

## *THE SELECT NOVELS AND TALES OF GEORGE SAND*

This series, in demy 8vo, will contain ten to twelve volumes at 8s 6d. Each volume is prefaced with a note on the story or stories concerned. The first ten copies of each volume are numbered and signed by the editor of the series (Hamish Miles) and are for sale at 21s. Prices net.

### *No 1* LITTLE FADETTE

Translated by HAMISH MILES

### *No 2* THE DEVIL'S POOL

Translated by HAMISH MILES

### *No 3* THE COUNTRY WAIF

Translated by EIRENE COLLIS,  
together with

### THE CASTLE OF PICTORDU

Translated by PHILIPPA H. WATSON

THE COUNTRY WAIF

THE CASTLE OF PICTORDU



GEORGE SAND

# THE COUNTRY WAIF

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# THE CASTLE OF PICTORDU

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Introductory Note by  
HAMISH MILES

1930

THE SCHOLARTIS PRESS  
THIRTY MUSEUM STREET, LONDON





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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

**F**RANÇOIS LE CHAMPI first saw the light under troubled stars. It was the second of those rustic tales which George Sand originally planned to make up a series which would bear the title of *Les Veillées du Chanvreur*. They were the fruit of a turbulent period in her life. Through them she escaped for a while from the dusty turmoil of opposition politics into the still, clear air of her beloved Berrichon country, utterly content to be listening, partly with the ears of memory, partly with those so quick to catch the rhythms of the actual life at her doors, to the distant thudding of the hemp-beater round whom she centred these tales, and to the familiar poetry of the rustic speech she savoured so fully. "Revenons a nos moutons, c'est à dire a nos bergeries," she said to her friend Rollinat (the R of the opening pages in the present story), in speaking of this revulsion from the affairs of Paris and politics. And this return to the fields and sheepfolds brought some of her finest work into being.

But Paris and politics revenged themselves on her story. For, as she recalled in the short preface she wrote for the tale in 1852, its progress as a feuilleton in the *Journal des Debats* was interrupted almost at its climax by the revolution of February 1848, and the affairs of the country foundling were left in mid-

air until those of Louis-Philippe had been more or less straightened out

Turgenev was reading the serial. And he wrote to Mme Viardot. "Your husband must surely have told you of Mme Sand's new novel which is appearing serially in the *Journal des Débats François le Champi*. It is in her best manner, simple, true, affecting. . . . Amongst other descriptions, there is one, in a few lines right at the beginning of the foreword, of an autumn day . . . It is wonderful. That woman has the gift of setting down the subtlest and most fleeting impressions in a manner at once firm, clear, and comprehensible. She can depict even a scent, even the faintest sound. . . ." He was right to point to that passage. It is a fragment characteristic of the best George Sand, fit even to set alongside that autumn evening which fades into silence and darkness in the later pages of *The Devil's Pool*

The story of the waif can speak for itself. There is an odd twist in the turn that his love takes, which some have found unreal, some distasteful. But the note of charm and simplicity struck in the opening scene persists, and none of her shorter novels is easier, few more compelling to read.

*The Castle of Pictordu* is much less well known, and belongs to a very different phase of George Sand's long, tempestuous life. She was a grandmother, and it was one of thirteen tales written for, and read to, her grandchildren down at Nohant between 1872 and 1875. Its fantasy veils the story of the budding and ripening of latent gifts, and there is much charm in the setting and in the sketches of character which the tale encloses. Yet it is hardly the fairy-tale it purports

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to be—the grown-ups must certainly have savoured its tones and undertones more fully than the children. But it is a good example of this facet of the writer's many sided gifts of thought and pen, and well deserves translation. George Sand's interest in children was always a lively one. In connection with *François le Champi*, she recalls how she herself had protected and reared several village foundlings of both sexes, and done so with success, although as, she astutely commented, "nothing is harder than to inspire the sentiment of dignity and love of work in children who have begun by knowingly subsisting on alms." And there are interesting comparisons to be found between the doctor's views on fantasy in the child's life, here in *The Castle of Pictordu*, and the writer's as she set them down, remembering her own childhood, in the second volume of the *Histoire de ma Vie*.

HAMISH MILES

April 1930



## FOREWORD

THE moonlight softly silvered the footpaths of the darkening countryside as R and I returned from our walk. It was an autumn evening, mild and faintly misty, and we were remarking on the mellowness of the air at that season, and on that elusive sense of the mysterious which then pervades nature. It seems as though the approach of winter's heavy sleep makes everybody and everything furtively agree to enjoy one last fragment of life and animation before the numbing fatality of the frost—and just as if wishing to trick the oncoming steps of time, as if dreading surprise and interruption in the last frolics of their rejoicings, the creatures of nature, animate and inanimate alike, move noiselessly and, as it seems, passively, to their nocturnal intoxication. From the birds come half stifled cries in place of the gay fanfares of summer. Here and there the insect in the furrows lets out an indiscreet remark—but breaks off at once and quickly goes on to tune his song or his plaint to a different key. The plants make haste to give off their last perfumes, all the more soothing for being so subtle and, as it were, so carefully restrained. The sere leaves hardly dare to tremble in the wind's breath, and silently the flocks browse in the fields without a cry of love or of battle.

My friend and I were walking with a certain cautiousness, and a mood of instinctive tranquillity made us



hushed and attentive to the softened tone of nature's beauty, to the bewitching harmony of her last strains as they faded away in an all but imperceptible *pianissimo*. For the fall of the year is a gracious and melancholy *andante* that leads most wonderfully to the solemn *adagio* of winter.

"It is all so peaceful," said my friend at length, for in spite of our silence we had been following each other's line of thought; "it all seems wrapped in a reverie so far removed from and unconcerned with the toils, the forebodings, the woes of man that I wonder how the face of nature we are seeing now could be interpreted in human terms what expression, what tints, what manifestation of art and poetry. To illustrate my ends more clearly, I would compare this evening, this sky, this landscape, now lying dead and yet so harmonious and complete, with the soul of a wise and religious peasant one who works and earns, enjoys his own way of living, and is without the need, the desire, or the means of manifesting and expressing his inner life. I, a civilised person, am trying to place myself in the heart of this mystery of simple rustic life. I know not how to enjoy instinctively and am always tortured with the desire to expound my contemplations and meditations to others and to myself.

"And then," continued my friend, "I find it difficult to discover what link there can be between my own brain, all too active, and the peasant's, which is not active enough. And I was brought to wonder just now what can be added by painting, music, description in short, by the interpretations of art to the beauty of this autumn night which reveals

itself to me in an elusive mystery and enters into my being by I know not what magical channels ”

“ Let me see,” I replied, “ whether I have grasped your question this October evening, that hueless sky, this music lacking in distinct or consecutive melody, this rural peace, that peasant who, by his very simplicity, is akin to us in his tacit enjoyment and understanding—let us group all that together and call it *primitive life*, primitive, that is, in relation to our own elaborate and complex life, which I may term *artificial life* And you are asking what is the possible relation, the direct link between these two contrasting states of existence, between palace and cottage, between the artist and the created world, between poet and ploughman ”

“ Yes,” he agreed, “ and more exactly—between the language of nature, primitive life and instincts, and that of art, science—in a word, of *knowledge* ”

“ To continue in your own strain, I reply that between *knowledge* and *sensation* the link is *feeling* ”

“ It is precisely for a definition of that feeling that I am questioning you in questioning myself It is he who has the task of interpretation who is troubling me It is he who is art (or the artist if you like), the interpreter of that candour, that grace, that charm of primitive life, to those who live artificially, and who are, if I may say so, in relation to nature and her divine secrets, the greatest donkeys in the world ”

“ You are asking nothing less than the secret of art seek it in the heart of God—no artist can reveal it to you He does not know it himself, he could not tell the sources of his inspiration or the causes of his

impotence. How is one to set about explaining beauty, simplicity, and truth? No one knows. And who could teach us? Not even the greatest artists can do that if they tried they would cease to be artists and become critics; and criticism! . . .”

“Criticism,” rejoined my friend, “has been walling round the mystery for centuries without understanding anything about it. But, excuse me, that is not exactly what I was asking. I am more radical than that just now. I am questioning the power of art. I scorn it, I annihilate it, I claim that art is unborn, that it does not exist, or that if it has existed its day is over. It is outworn, formless, lifeless, with no means for singing the beauty of truth. Nature is a work of art, but God is the sole artist, and man is merely an adaptor in bad taste. Nature is beautiful, feeling breathes from her every pore; love, youth, and beauty are undying in her. But to feel and express them man has only absurd ways and his feeble faculties. He would be wiser not to interfere, to remain dumb and absorbed in contemplation. Come, what do you think?”

“I agree. I ask nothing better,” I answered.

“Ah!” he cried, “you are going too far. you are taking my paradox too literally. I am pleading a cause. respond”

“Very well, I will argue that a sonnet of Petrarch has its relative beauty which is equivalent to the beauty of the pool at Vacluse; that a beautiful Ruysdael landscape has a charm equivalent to that of this lovely evening; that Mozart sings with the tongue of men as well as Philomela in that of birds, that Shakespeare delineates passions, feelings, and instincts as vividly as the most primitive and real

man might feel them That is art, that is the link—  
in a word, that is *feeling* ! ”

“ Yes—a work of transformation ! But suppose I remain unsatisfied ? After all, if you were right a thousand times according to the rules of taste and æsthetics, suppose I find the cadence of the waterfall more harmonious than Petrarch’s verse, and so on in each instance ? Suppose I hold that this evening gives me something that no one could have shown me had I not partaken of it myself, and that all Shakespeare’s ardour is cold compared with the passion in the eyes of a jealous peasant beating his wife, what is your reply ? It is a question of convincing my feelings. Suppose they defeat your examples and surmount your proofs ? Art is no infallible interpreter, one’s feelings are not always satisfied by even the best of definitions ”

“ Well, I don’t know what I can say—unless that art is a process of demonstration of which nature is the standing proof, that the pre-existent fact of that proof is always there to justify and contradict the demonstration, and that it cannot be made good unless the proof be examined in a spirit of religion and love ”

“ So the demonstration depends on the proof, but could not the proof dispense with the demonstration ? ”

“ Doubtless God could dispense with it, although you are talking as if you were not one of us, I wager you would not understand the proof in the least if you had not found the demonstration expressed in a thousand ways in art, and if you yourself were not a demonstration continually based on the proof ”

“ Ah ! that’s just what I can’t bear I want to get rid of this everlasting demonstration, it chafes me I

want to annihilate in my mind the lessons and forms of art, never to think of painting when I admire landscape, of music when I hear the wind, of poetry when I absorb and take delight in the whole. I want to enjoy it all instinctively that chirruping grasshopper seems to me gayer and more exhilarated than I am."

"You regret, in fact, that you are a man?"

"No, I regret that I am no longer primitive man"

"It is questionable if he enjoyed, not having understanding"

"I do not suppose him to be akin to the brute creation. When he became a man he immediately understood and felt differently. But I cannot get any exact idea of his emotions, and that is what troubles me. I should like to be that which society allows a great number of men to be, from the cradle to the grave, I should like to be a peasant the peasant who cannot read, who is endowed by God with good instincts, a sound constitution, and an upright conscience I feel that a slumbering of useless faculties and an ignorance of depravity, would give me happiness like that of the primitive man dreamt of by Jean-Jacques."

"Well, I've had that dream, too Who hasn't? But that would not prove your reasoning, for the humblest and most ingenuous peasant is yet an artist, and I even assert that their art is superior to ours It is a differing form, but it comes nearer to my soul than all the forms of our civilisation. The songs, the narratives, the rustic tales, paint in few words that which our literature can merely amplify and disguise."

## FOREWORD

"Then, I am right?" returned my friend "That art is the purest and the best which arises more directly from nature by being in immediate contact with her I confess I went to extremes in saying that art is useless, but I also said I should like to feel as a peasant feels, and this I don't retract There are certain Breton ballads, composed by the beggars, three couplets of which are worth all Goethe and all Byron put together, and which show there is more spontaneous and complete appreciation of truth and beauty in these simple folk than in the most illustrious poets And music too! Are there not wonderful melodies in our country's music? As for painting, they have none, but they have it in their language, which is a hundred times more vivid, forcible, and logical than our literary tongue"

"I agree," I replied, "and as for the last point especially, I often feel in despair at being forced to write the language of the French Academy when I am better acquainted with another far superior for the rendering of a whole order of emotions, feelings, and thoughts"

"Yes, yes, that naive world," said he, "that world unknown and closed to our modern art, no study of which, peasant of the earth, will explain you to yourself if you bring it into the domain of civilised art, into the intellectual intercourse of artificiality"

"Alas!" I answered, "this troubles me deeply I myself have seen and felt, with all civilised beings, that primitive life is the dream, the ideal of all men and all ages From the shepherds of Longus to those of the Trianon, pastoral life has been a scented Eden where tortured souls sick of the world's tumult

have sought to hide. And art, the great flatterer, that obliging solace of too happy people, has passed through an unbroken sequence of pastorals. I have often wanted to write a learned and critical book entitled *A History of Pastorals*, in which I should survey all those different sylvan dreams on which the upper classes have fed so passionately.

“I should trace their variations as being always in inverse relation to the depravity of morals, becoming pure and sentimental as society grew corrupt and shameless. I should like to be able to *command* a writer abler than myself to write this book and with what pleasure I should then read it! It would be a complete treatise on art, for music, painting, architecture, literature in all its forms (play, poem, novel, eclogue, song), fashions, gardens, even costumes all have undergone the bewitchment of the pastoral dream. All the figures of the golden age, the shepherdesses who were nymphs and then marquises, the shepherdesses of *L'Astrée* who passed by the banks of Florian's Lignon: who donned satin and powder under Louis XV, and to whom Sedaine began to give sabots at the end of the monarchy they are all more or less false, and to-day they seem contemptible and ridiculous to us. We have done with them, we hardly see them save in phantom form at the opera, and yet time was when they reigned at court, and were the delight of crowned heads, who borrowed their crooks and baskets.

“I have often wondered why there are no more shepherds, for in these days we are not such devotees of reality that our art and literature can afford to scorn these conventional figures, any more than those

whom fashion is now setting up We live in an age of energy and cruelty, and on the canvas of these passions we broder ornaments which, could we take them seriously, would be of hair-raising horror ! ”

“ If we no longer have shepherds,” replied my friend, “ if literature has but changed one false ideal for another, might it not be that art is making an involuntary attempt to find its own level, to come within the scope of all types of intelligence ? Will not that dream of equality flung before the people force art to become brutish and fiery, in order to awaken the instincts and passions common to all men, whatever their rank ? We have not yet touched truth It does not lie in a reality made uglier, any more than in a prettified ideal, but we are seeking it—that is obvious, and if we have set about our search wrongly, we are only the more eager to find it Look how the theatre, poetry, and the novel have substituted the dagger for the shepherd’s crook ! and when they introduce rustic life they contrive to give it a certain strain of reality known in old time pastorals But there is hardly a trace of poetry in it, I grieve to say, and I see no way of reviving the rustic ideal without painting its cheeks or blackening its scowl I know you have often thought of doing so, but could you succeed ? ”

“ I am afraid not,” I replied, “ for I know of no form for it, and my sense of rustic simplicity cannot be expressed in the right language If I made the labourer use his own mode of speech it would have to be translated for the educated reader, and if I make him talk as we do he becomes an impossible creature, to whom one attributes ideas he could never have ”

“ Besides, even if you did make him use his way of



talking, your own language would continually contrast unpleasantly with it , and, in my opinion, you cannot escape this criticism. You draw a peasant girl, you call her Jeanne, and you put into her mouth words she might quite well use , but you are a novelist, and you would like your readers to share the pleasure you feel in depicting this character, so you compare her to a druidess, to Joan of Arc, and so forth. Your opinions and your language make a discord with hers like clashing colours in a picture ; and one cannot enter into nature under such circumstances, even by idealising it.

“ You have since written a better study of reality *The Devil's Pool*, but I am not altogether satisfied, for *the author* still peeps out from time to time, you have used “ *author's words*,” to quote Henri Monnier, an artist who succeeded in portraying the truth in caricature, and who as a result solved the problem he set himself. I know your difficulty is no less real. But you must persevere, even if you don't succeed , masterpieces are only lucky attempts. So long as you make conscientious efforts you need not bother about creating a masterpiece.”

“ That is comfort in advance,” I replied , “ and I shall begin again as soon as you like , please give me your advice ”

“ Well, for instance,” he said, “ last evening we attended a village gathering at the farm-house The hemp-dresser told stories until two in the morning. The curé's servant helped and corrected him , she is a peasant with a little education, whereas he is quite untutored, but gifted and eloquent enough in his fashion. Between them they told us a true story

rather long, a sort of homely novel Can you recall it ? ”

“ Perfectly I could tell it word for word in their language ”

“ Yes, but their language needs translating, it should be written in your *own* language without the use of a single other word unless its meaning is so obvious to the reader as to make a note unnecessary ”

“ I see you are imposing a heartbreaking task on me I have thrown myself into it before, and come out of the attempt dissatisfied with myself, and convinced of my impotence ”

“ No matter ! You will throw yourself into it again—I know what you artists are, you are enthusiastic only when confronted by obstacles, and you do things badly if you don’t suffer in the doing of them Come, begin, tell me that story of the Waif—but not as we heard it together It was a masterpiece of narration to the minds and ears of us children of the soil But repeat it to me as though a Parisian speaking the modern tongue stood at your right hand, and a peasant before whom you did not wish to say a phrase or even a word he would not comprehend, on your left So that you must speak intelligently for the Parisian, and simply for the peasant The one will accuse you of a lack of colour, the other of a lack of elegance But I shall be there to judge by what means art, without ceasing to be art, for everyone can enter into the mystery of primitive simplicity and convey to the mind that charm inherent in nature ”

“ So we are going to make a *study* between us ? ”

“ Yes, for I shall interrupt you when you stumble ”

“ Let us sit down on this thyme covered bank,

and I'll begin. But first you must allow me to steady my voice by going over a scale or two."

"What's that ? I did not know you were a singer."

"I am only speaking metaphorically I believe one should recall some theme or other to use as a model before beginning a work of art and thus fall into the right frame of mind So, in order to prepare myself to fulfil your request, I must tell you the story of BRISQUET's dog, which is short, and which I have by heart "

"What is it about ? I don't remember."

"It is an exercise for my voice. Charles Nodier wrote it He tried his voice in all possible keys. To my mind he was a great artist, but he never received all the honour he merited, as so many more of his attempts were bad than good ; still, when a man has created two or three masterpieces, however short, he ought to be recognised, and have his faults overlooked

"This is BRISQUET's dog. Listen."

And I told my friend the story of *La Bichonne*. it moved him almost to tears, and he declared it to be a masterpiece in its kind

"It should discourage me from my attempt," I said to him, "for that odyssey of BRISQUET's poor dog, which took a bare five minutes to tell, is flawless, it is a pure diamond cut by the most skilled lapidary in the world for Nodier was essentially a lapidary in literature. Now, I am unscientific, and have to resort to sentiment Besides, I can't promise to make the story short, and I know before I begin that that prime quality, excellence and brevity combined, will be lacking in my study "

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"Never mind, go on," said my friend, tired of these preliminaries

"Well then," I went on, "it is the story of *François le Champi*, and I will try to recall the beginning faithfully. It was Monique, the cure's aged servant, who began it."

"Just a second," said my critical auditor, "I object to the title. *Champi* is not a French word."

"Excuse me," I replied, "the dictionary calls it obsolete, but Montaigne uses it, and I don't set up to be more French than the great writers who forge the language. Therefore, instead of calling my tale *François the Foundling*, or *François the Bastard*, I call it *François the Champi*, that is, the child left in the fields, as they used to say once in the fashionable world, and as we say hereabouts to this day."



## THE COUNTRY WAIF

ONE morning as Madeleine Blanchet, the young wife of the miller of Cormouet, was going to do her washing at the fountain at the bottom of the meadow, she found a child seated in front of her washing board. He was playing with the straw which served as a kneeling mat for the laundresses. Madeleine Blanchet, on inspecting the child, was astonished to find that she did not know him. In those parts the roads are unfrequented save by the inhabitants.

"Who are you, little boy?" she asked the child, who returned her gaze trustingly, but without appearing to understand her question.

"What's your name?" went on Madeleine Blanchet, sitting him beside her as she knelt down to begin washing.

"François," replied the child.

"François who?"

"Who?" repeated the child innocently.

"Whose son are you?"

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"You don't know your father's name?"

"I haven't got one."

"Is he dead then?"

"I don't know."

"And your mother?"

"She is over there," said the child, pointing to a miserable little cottage, a couple of gun-shots' distance from the mill, its thatch just visible through the willow trees.

"Oh! I know," continued Madeleine, "it is the woman who has come to live here. She moved in last night."

"Yes," answered the child

"You used to live at Mers ?"

"I don't know."

"You are not a very knowledgable boy. Do you even know your mother's name ?"

"Yes, she is Zabelle."

"Isabelle who? Don't you know her by any other name ?"

"Of course I don't."

"The bit you know won't do you any harm," smiled Madeleine, beginning to scrub her linen.

"What did you say ?" asked little François

Madeleine looked at him again. He was a pretty boy with wonderful eyes. "What a pity he is so simple," she thought. "How old are you ?" she asked. "Perhaps you don't know that either."

True, he knew that no more than anything else, but he did his best to answer, being perhaps ashamed that the miller's wife thought him so silly. And he delivered himself of the bright reply, "Two years old."

"I should think so!" retorted Madeleine, wringing out her linen without glancing at him again, "you are a real little goose, and no one has bothered to teach you, my poor child. From your size you must be six at least, but you are not two in wisdom."

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"Very likely," replied François. Then, making a further effort as if he were trying to shake off his own stupidity, he said "You asked me my name. They call me François the Waif."

"Ah! I understand now," said Madeleine, turning a compassionate eye upon him. She was no longer surprised to see this bonny child so dirty, so ragged, and so entirely given up to the stupidities of children of his age.

"You have hardly anything on," she said, "and it is not warm weather. I dare say you are cold?"

"I don't know," answered the poor little waif. He was so used to suffering he had ceased to be aware of it. Madeleine sighed. She thought of her own little Jeannie, only a year old, snugly asleep in his cradle, watched over by his grandmother, while this poor boy shivered alone by the fountain. He was preserved from drowning only by Providence, for he was foolish enough to be unaware that if he fell into the water he might die.

Madeleine, who was a very good-hearted soul, took the child's arm and found it hot, although he shivered continually, and his pretty face was quite pale.

"Are you feverish?" she asked him.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied the child, who undoubtedly had a fever.

Madeleine Blanchet took off the woollen shawl which covered her shoulders, and wrapped it round the waif. He suffered her to do so without showing signs of either surprise or pleasure. She then took all the straw she had been kneeling on, and made him a



little bed in which he quickly fell asleep. Madeleine briskly finished washing her little Jeannie's garments, for she was still nursing him and wanted to get home.

When the washing was done she could not carry it all back at once, for wet linen is twice as heavy as dry, so she left the board and some of her things at the water's edge, thinking to herself that she would awaken the waif when she came back. She took up all she could carry to the house. Madeleine Blanchet was neither big nor strong. She was a pretty little woman, proudly courageous, and known for her gentleness and good sense.

As she opened the door of the house she heard a sound of sabots pattering after her on the little bridge over the mill-dam, and, turning round, she saw the waif who had caught her up. He had brought her board, the soap, the rest of the linen, and her woollen cape.

"Oh! you are not so stupid as I imagined," she said, putting her hand on his shoulder, "for you are willing, and no good-hearted person is ever a fool. Come in, my child, and rest. Just look at the poor little thing, his load is heavier than himself! Look, mother," she said to the old wife, who was bringing her daughter-in-law her child, dainty and smiling, "here is a poor little waif. He seems to be ill. You know all about fevers, couldn't you try to cure him?"

"Oh! it's a fever brought on by want," answered the old woman, examining François, "that can be cured by giving him good soup—that's what he doesn't get. It is the waif belonging to the woman who

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moved in yesterday She is one of your husband's tenants, Madeleine She seems to be in want, and I fear she won't pay up very often "

Madeleine did not reply She knew that her mother-in-law and her husband were harsh dealers and preferred hard cash to charitableness She put her child to the breast, and when the old woman had gone out to round up her geese she took François by the hand and with Jeannie on her other arm, set off for Mother Zabelle's cottage

Mother Zabelle, whose real name was Isabelle Bigot, was a woman of fifty She was as generous natured as it is possible to be when one is destitute and for ever on the verge of starvation In order to have a little sum coming in regularly each month and eventually to have a young helper in the place, she had taken François, then just weaned from a dying woman, and had brought him up ever since But now that she had lost her cattle, she needed to buy more on credit as soon as possible, for she could not make money by means of her little flock and a dozen hens which picked up their food on the common Until François reached the age of confirmation it would be his job to guard these few creatures at the roadside , after that, he was to be hired out as swineherd or ploughboy , and, if he was a good boy, he would give part of his earnings to his foster mother

It was just after Martinmas, and when she left Mers Mother Zabelle had left her last goat in payment for her rent She had come to live in the little cottage belonging to the mill at Cormouer with no other guarantee than a bed, two chairs, a chest, and a few bits of pottery-ware But the house was in such

bad repair, so badly fenced, of such paltry value, that it had either to be left uninhabited or the miller had to take the risk of having wretchedly poor tenants.

Madeleine talked to Mother Zabelle, and soon saw that she was not at all an ill-meaning woman; and that she would do what she could to pay regularly. Madeleine found that the woman was really fond of her waif, but she was so used to seeing him suffer along with herself that the pity of the rich miller's wife occasioned her more surprise than pleasure at first.

When she at last recovered from her astonishment and realised that, far from coming to extort money from her, Madeleine wished to help her she took courage and recited all her story. It was much the same as that of any other poor creature, and she ended by thanking Madeleine effusively for her interest. Madeleine said she would help her as much as she could, but begged her not to tell anyone as she was not really the mistress in her husband's house, and could only help people secretly.

Madeleine then gave Mother Zabelle her woollen shawl and made her promise to cut it up into clothes for the waif that very evening; she was not to let the pieces be seen before they were sewn together. Noticing that Mother Zabelle seemed rather unwilling to cut up a shawl which she would have found comfortable and useful for herself, Madeleine threatened to stop helping her unless she saw the waif warmly clad within three days. "Do you imagine," she added, "that my mother-in-law, who misses nothing, would not recognise my shawl round your shoulders? Do you want to get me into trouble? If you are careful this time I will help you again in other ways.

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Now, listen to me, your little waif is feverish and will die if you don't look after him properly "

"Do you really think so ? " said Mother Zabelle  
"That child is an uncommonly good natured little creature and it would grieve me to lose him , he never grumbles and is as obedient as a well-born child As a rule, you know, these foundlings are troublesome little terrors and are always evilly disposed "

"Well, that is because they are despised and ill-treated If this one is good you can be sure it is because you are good to him "

"True enough," returned Mother Zabelle, "children are wiser than one thinks This child is not a bit naughty, you know , and, besides, he knows how to make himself useful Last year when I was ill (he was only five then), he looked after me as well as a grown-up would have done "

"Listen ! " said the miller's wife, "send him to me every morning and evening, at the time when I am giving my child his soup I will make more than enough and François can eat the rest , no one will notice "

"Oh ! but I wouldn't dare to bring him to your house, and he hasn't enough sense to know the right time himself "

"Well, I'll tell you what we'll do As soon as the soup is ready I will put my distaff on the bridge over the dam You see it can be seen quite well from here Then you can send the child with a sabot in his hand as if he wanted to get some embers You will both of you be better fed, for you will be able to eat all your soup yourself if I give him some of mine "

"That's true," replied Mother Zabelle, "I can tell

you are a sensible person, and I am lucky to have come here. If I had been able to go elsewhere I would not have taken your husband's cottage, for, besides the fact that it is in bad repair and he asks a high rent, I was afraid of him, they say hereabouts he is a hard man. But I see you are good to poor folk and I believe you will help me to rear my waif. Oh ! if only the soup would cure his fever ! The worst that could happen to me would be to lose the child ! True, I get little enough out of it, for what the foundling hospital sends goes to keep him, but I love him as if he were my own son. I know he is a good boy and will help me later on. You know, he is well-grown for his age and he will soon be able to earn a bit."

Thus it was that François the waif was brought up in the kind hands of Madeleine the miller's wife. He soon recovered his health, for he was, as they say hereabouts, "built of lime and sand," that is to say, he had a sound constitution. No rich man in the country could have desired a bonnier or better-made lad for a son. Besides, he was as brave as a grown man, he could swim like a fish, dive under the mill-dam, and was as fearless of fire as of water. He would leap on the backs of unbroken colts and take them out to grass without even haltering them, spurring them on with his heels and clinging to their manes while leaping the ditches. The odd thing was that he did all this in a quiet unassuming way, without talking about it, and never changing his rather sleepy and simple-minded air. It was this appearance of stupidity which made people think him a half-wit, whereas there was no child more able, sharper, or more sure of himself, when it came to things like dislodging the

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magpies from the top of the highest poplar, rounding up stray cattle, or killing a thrush with a stone. The other children put it down to the luck which is attributed to waifs in this world. In any dangerous games they pushed him to the front.

"He won't come to any harm," they said, "he is a waif! Wheaten grain can't withstand the tempest, but tares never get damaged."

All went well for a couple of years. Mother Zabelle somehow managed to buy a few cattle. She did little jobs at the mill and persuaded Master Cadet Blanchet, the miller, to mend the roof of her house where the water poured in. She and her waif were able to dress better, and she gradually lost the miserable appearance she had shown on her arrival at the cottage. Madeleine's mother-in-law certainly made bitter remarks about the disappearance of some little things and about the amount of bread they consumed in the house. Once Madeleine had to take the blame herself rather than let suspicion fall on Mother Zabelle. Contrary to the expectations of his mother, however, Cadet Blanchet did not worry about these things and apparently even wanted to shut his eyes to them.

The truth is that Cadet Blanchet was still very much in love with his wife. Madeleine was pretty without being a flirt, he was always being congratulated on his choice—and, besides, his business was prospering. He was a person who was hard hearted only because he feared unhappiness, and had really more regard for Madeleine than one would have thought him capable of. This caused a certain amount of jealousy on the part of Blanchet's mother,

and she revenged herself in various unpleasant ways. Madeleine bore this uncomplainingly and never told her husband.

It was certainly the way to stop such things quickly, and no one could have been more patient or more reasonable than Madeleine. But there is a saying in these parts that the results of kindness are less far-reaching than the results of malice, and there came a day when Madeleine was questioned about and scolded for her charitable actions.

It was a year of frozen crops and the river floods had ruined the hay-making. Cadet Blanchet was out of humour; and one day, as he was returning from market with a friend who had just married a very good-looking girl, the latter said to him "Well, you had nothing to grumble about either *in your day*, for your Madeleine was also a fine girl."

"What do you mean by '*my day*,' and '*my Madeleine was*'? One would imagine we were old! Madeleine is only twenty now, and I haven't noticed that she has lost her looks"

"Oh, no! I don't say that," returned the other. "Certainly Madeleine is still good-looking, but really when a woman marries so young she soon ceases to be admired for her looks. When she has nursed a child she is already worn out, and your wife was never very strong, as one sees now when she looks so thin and poorly. Is poor Madeleine ill then?"

"Not that I know of. Why do you ask?"

"Well, I don't know. She looks sad to me as if she felt ill or weary. Ah! women their beauty lasts but a moment, like the flowering of a vine! I suppose I shall soon see mine wearing a long face and

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a grave expression As for us men, so long as our wives give us cause for jealousy we are in love with them They irritate us, we shout at them, sometimes we even beat them, that upsets them, they weep, they stay at home, afraid of us—they get bored and cease to love us Then we feel satisfied, we are their masters But there comes a day when we realise that nobody envies us our wives, for they have grown ugly Well, then see what happens! we don't love them any more, and we turn our attention to other people's Good night, Cadet Blanchet, you were a little affectionate with my wife to night I saw it all, but I didn't say anything However, it will not make us any the less good friends, and I will try not to make her as unhappy as your wife is—I know myself, if I became jealous I should be spiteful, and when I had no more need for jealousy I should probably be even worse ”

A sensible person profits by a useful lesson, but Cadet Blanchet, although an intelligent and energetic man, was too proud to be reasonable He walked into his house with angry eyes and hunched shoulders He stared at Madeleine as if he had not seen her for a long while He noticed that she was pale and altered in looks He asked her if she felt ill so harshly that she turned still paler and answered weakly that she was quite well He became angry—Heaven knows why—and sat down to table feeling a desire to pick a quarrel with someone His opportunity soon came They were discussing the high price of wheat, and Mother Blanchet remarked, as she did every evening, that they ate too much bread Madeleine said nothing Cadet Blanchet wanted to blame her for the waste The



old woman declared that every morning she had caught the waif making off with half a loaf. Instead of getting angry and standing up to them, Madeleine only wept. Blanchet thought about what his friend had said, and that made him even more bitter. so much so, indeed, that from that very day, explain it as you will, he ceased to love his wife and made her life unbearable.

**H**E made her miserable , and, since he had never made her happy, her marriage was doubly unfortunate. At sixteen she had been married to this rough, red-faced man who drank on Sunday, raged on Monday, felt depressed on Tuesday, and on the following days worked like a horse to make up for lost time. He was too avaricious to spare a moment to think of his wife. On Saturdays he was nicer, for he had done his work and was thinking of to-morrow's pleasures. But one day of good temper a week is not enough. Madeleine could not bear to see him jovial, for she knew that he would come in in a violent rage the next night. But she was young and sweet and so gentle that he could not long be angry with her, and there were still moments when love and a sense of justice made him take her two hands in his and say "Madeleine, there could be no better wife than you. I believe you were made for me. Had I married a flirt—I see many of them about—I would have killed her or flung myself under my mill wheel. But I know how good and industrious you are—you are worth your weight in gold."

But when, after four years of married life, his love faded, he never had a kind word for her—only contempt that she took no notice of his ill-behaviour. What could she have said? She knew her husband was unjust, but she considered it her duty to respect the

master she could not cherish and never to reproach him.

Her mother-in-law noticed with pleasure that her son had become master of the house again. she said it seemed as if he had forgotten his headship and had not made it felt. She hated her daughter-in-law for being so much better than herself. Unable to find fault, she scorned her for her delicate health, for having a cough in the winter, for having but one child. She despised her for these things, because she knew how to read and write, and because she read her prayers on Sunday in a corner of the orchard instead of joining her and the neighbouring gossips in their chattering and mumbling.

Madeleine commended her soul to God, and suffered resignedly; she regarded grumbling as useless. She had withdrawn her mind from earthly things and often dreamed of paradise as if she would have found death a pleasant thing. However, she took care of her health and strength, for she felt that her child's happiness depended on her, and she accepted everything because of the love she bore him.

She was not really very fond of Mother Zabelle, but she liked the way in which the woman, half out of kindness and half in her own interests, continued to care for the poor waif. Madeleine, seeing how bad selfish people become, admired only those who were thoughtful for others. But she was the only person in those parts who was entirely unselfish she was, therefore, lonely and dull, perhaps without realising why.

Little by little she observed the waif (he was then ten years old) falling into her ways of thinking,

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this she gathered from his behaviour—for as to powers of expression, the poor child showed himself no more sensible in his way of speech than on the day she had first questioned him. He had no idea of how to talk, and when anyone tried to chat with him he could not respond, for he knew less than nothing. But when there was an errand to be run he was always willing—if it was a case of serving Madeleine he did it before she asked. Though he seemed not to grasp the request, he performed the act so quickly and so well that even Madeleine was amazed.

One day as he was carrying little Jean, the baby was amusing himself pulling François' hair, Madeleine took the child away from him, saying, with a touch of displeasure, and, as it seemed, in spite of herself, "François, if you begin by letting others take advantage of you you never know where they will stop."

François stupefied her with his reply, "I would rather bear the suffering than return it."

Madeleine looked wonderingly into the eyes of the little waif and saw there something she had never seen in those of more sensible people, something at once so good-natured and so determined that it quite staggered her. She was sitting on the grass with her child in her lap, and drew the waif down on to her outspread skirt without daring to speak to him.

Madeleine could not have explained even to herself why she felt a kind of fear and shame at having so often made fun of François for his stupidity. True, she had always been gentle about it, and perhaps his silliness had made her love and pity him the more; but now she felt that he had always understood and suffered from her teasing without being able to reply.

to it. Then she forgot this incident, for, a little while afterwards, her husband being infatuated with a village wench ceased to care at all for his wife, and forbade her to allow Mother Zabelle or her lad to set foot in the mill.

After that Madeleine thought only of how she could help them even more secretly. She warned Mother Zabelle, telling her that for a time she would appear to have forgotten them.

But Mother Zabelle was afraid of the miller, and she was not, like Madeleine, a woman who would suffer anything for those whom she loved. She said to herself that the miller, being the master, could very well turn her out or raise her rent, which Madeleine could not hinder. She thought that by humbling herself to Mother Blanchet she could get on good terms with her, and that her protection would be more valuable than that of the younger woman.

She went to the old mother and said that in spite of herself for the sake of the waif whom she could not afford to support she had had to accept Madeleine's help. The old woman hated the waif solely because Madeleine took care of him. She advised Mother Zabelle to get rid of him promising to get her six months' credit of rent on that condition.

It was again the day after Martinmas, and Mother Zabelle had no money, for it was a bad year. Madeleine had been so closely watched that she had found it impossible to give her any, so Mother Zabelle bravely accepted the condition and promised to return the waif to the foundling hospital before the morrow.

No sooner had she made the promise than she

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repented of it, and the sight of little François asleep on his pallet left her as heavy-hearted as if she were about to do something wicked. She hardly slept a wink, before daybreak Mother Blanchet came to her, saying "Come along now, get up! You must stick to your promise. If you wait until my daughter-in-law has talked you round you won't do it. See! in her interests as well as your own you must send the boy away. My son has taken a dislike to him for his stupidity and greed, my daughter-in-law has pampered him too much—I am sure he is a thief already. All waifs are so from birth, and it is ridiculous to expect anything else from such brats. This one will get you turned out of here, he will get you into bad repute, on his account my son will take to beating his wife one of these days, and, to crown it all, when he is big and strong he will become a robber on the roads and cause you shame. Come, come, be off! Take him to Corlay by the field path. The diligence passes at eight o'clock. Get in with him and by midday at the latest you will be at Chateauroux. You can come back this evening. Here is money for the journey, and enough over to have a meal in the town."

Mother Zabelle roused the child and dressed him in his best clothes, she made a parcel of his other belongings, and taking him by the hand set out in the moonlight.

But as they went along, and as the day lightened, her courage sank, she could not go fast or talk, and when she reached the road she sat down at the side of the ditch, more dead than alive. The diligence was coming. They were only just in time.

The waif was never in the habit of worrying about things, and up till then he had followed his mother without question. But when, for the first time in his life, he saw a large coach coming towards him, he was frightened of the noise it made, and tried to draw Mother Zabelle back towards the field from which they had just emerged. Mother Zabelle thought he must have realised his fate, and said to him . "Come along, my poor François, it's got to be !"

This frightened François still more. He imagined the diligence was a big animal, running after him to eat him up. He was very brave in dangers he understood, but now he lost his head and ran screaming across the meadow.

Mother Zabelle ran after him, but when she saw his deathly pallor her courage evaporated altogether. She followed him to the end of the field and let the diligence go by.

THEY returned the way they had come, half-way to the mill. There they stopped, tired out. Mother Zabelle was worried to see that the child trembled from head to foot, and his breast heaved under his ragged blouse. She made him sit down, and tried to comfort him. But she did not know what she was saying, and François was in no condition to understand her. She took a bit of bread out of her basket and tried to make him eat, but he had no appetite, and they sat silent for a while.

At last Mother Zabelle, who always reverted to her first thoughts, grew ashamed of her weakness and told herself that to return to the mill with the child was to bring trouble on herself. Another coach should pass at midday, and she made up her mind to rest where she was until it was time to go back to the roadside. But François had almost been frightened out of his few wits, and, for the first time in his life, he was capable of offering resistance—so Mother Zabelle set about getting him used to the horses' bells, the rolling of the wheels, and the rapidity of the huge coach.

But in trying to give him confidence she said just too much, perhaps remorse made her too talkative, perhaps François had heard Mother Blanchet say something just as he woke up that morning—and that came back into his mind, perhaps his wits



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were suddenly cleared by approaching misfortune : whatever the cause, he turned to Mother Zabelle with the same look in his eyes that had so impressed and almost awed Madeleine, and said "Mother, you want to send me away, you want to take me somewhere far off and leave me there."

Then the words "foundling hospital," which had sometimes been allowed to escape in his presence, came back to him. He did not know what they meant, but it seemed to him even more terrifying than the diligence, he cried out, trembling. "You want to put me in the foundling hospital!"

Mother Zabelle had gone too far to draw back. She fancied the child knew more about it than he really did, and, without realising that she would hardly have found it difficult to mislead him and to get rid of him by surprise, she began to explain the true state of affairs. She tried to point out to him that he would be much happier at the hospital than with her and better cared for, that he would be taught to work, and that he would, for a time, live with some woman, less badly off than herself, who would be a mother to him.

Such consolations only added to the poor waif's misery. The unknown time to come frightened him more than all Mother Zabelle's attempts to show him how badly he fared with her. Moreover, he loved with all his strength that mother who cared for him less than for herself. And he loved someone else nearly as much as Mother Zabelle and that was Madeleine but he did not know he loved her and said nothing of it.

He only flung himself sobbing on the ground,

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tearing out handfuls of grass and covering his face, like an epileptic Mother Zabelle, angered and upset to see him in that state, tried to pick him up and began threatening him François thereupon banged his head so hard on the stones that it bled, and she thought he would surely kill himself

At this moment Providence willed that Madeleine Blanchet should pass She knew nothing of the departure of Mother Zabelle with the child She had been to Presles with wool she had spun A well-to-do person had wanted it very finely done, and Madeleine was the best wool-spinner thereabouts She had received the money and was returning to the mill with it in her pocket She was just about to cross the river by one of the narrow planks, balanced from bank to bank, often used in the fields in those parts, when she heard heart-rending cries, and suddenly recognised the voice of the poor waif

She ran in their direction, and found the bleeding child struggling in Mother Zabelle's arms At first she did not grasp what it was about It looked as if Mother Zabelle had been beating the boy, and was now trying to get loose from him This seemed all the more probable, for François, as soon as he saw her, ran towards her, and, twining himself about her legs like a snake and clinging to her petticoats, cried "Madame Blanchet, Madame Blanchet, save me"

Mother Zabelle was a big, strong woman, Madeleine small, and slender as a reed She was not afraid, however, and thinking the woman had gone crazy and wanted to murder the boy, she put herself in front of him, determined to defend him or to let herself be killed whilst he ran away

But the thing was soon cleared up. Mother Zabelle, who felt less angry than sorry, told Madeleine what had happened. From this François understood at last all the misery that it was his lot to undergo, and this time made use of what he heard more sensibly than seemed possible. When Mother Zabelle had finished, he clung to the legs and skirts of the miller's wife, saying "Don't send me away, don't let me be sent away." And he ran from the weeping Mother Zabelle to the miller's wife, who was even more distressed, uttering all sorts of words and prayers which seemed as if they could not have come from his lips at all for the first time in his life he was able to say what he willed

"Oh! my mother, my sweet mother," he said to Mother Zabelle, "why do you want to leave me? Do you want me to die of sorrow because I can't see you any more? What have I done that you have stopped loving me? Haven't I always done what you told me? Have I done anything wrong? I have always looked after our animals, you said so yourself, you kissed me every night and called me your child, you never told me you are not my mother. Mother, keep me, keep me, I pray you as I pray to God. I'll always look after you, I'll always work for you, if I don't please you you can beat me and I will say nothing; but don't send me away until I do something bad."

And he went to Madeleine, saying. "Madame, have pity on me. Tell my mother to keep me. I will never come to your house again if they don't want me there, and when you want to give me things I will know I must not take them. I'll go

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and talk to Miller Blanchet, I'll tell him to beat me and not to scold you on my account. And when you go out in the fields I'll always be with you to carry your baby, and I'll amuse him all day. I'll do everything you tell me, and if ever I do wrong you won't have to love me any more. But don't let me be sent away. I don't want to go, I'd rather throw myself in the river." And poor François looked down at the river, going so close that it was obvious that his life hung by a thread—that at the word of refusal he would drown himself. Madeleine spoke up for the child, and, though Mother Zabelle wanted desperately to heed her, she saw that they were near the mill—and that was a different thing than being near the road.

"Come along, you bad boy," she said, "I will keep you, but it means that I will be begging my bread by the wayside to-morrow. And you are too stupid to realise it will be your fault that I am reduced to that. That's what comes of taking charge of a child who means nothing to me, and who doesn't even repay his keep."

"That will do, Zabelle," said the miller's wife, taking the waif up in her arms to carry him off in spite of his already considerable weight. "See! here are ten crowns for you to pay your rent, or to move elsewhere if you are turned out of here. It is my money, I earned it, I know they will ask me for it but I don't care. They can kill me if they like. I'll buy this child. He's mine—not yours any more. You aren't worthy of the care of such a good-hearted boy, and who loves you so dearly. I'll be his mother, and they'll have to put up with it. One can bear anything for the sake of one's children. I would

be cut in little bits for my Jeannie's sake ; well, I would endure as much for this boy. Come along, my poor François, you're not a waif any more, do you understand ? You have a mother and you can love her as much as you like , she will love you in return with all her heart."

Madeleine said these words without really knowing what she was saying. She who was composure itself had completely lost her head for the moment. Her good nature had revolted and she was really angry with Mother Zabelle. François had flung his arms round her neck and pressed her so close that she could hardly breathe, and at the same time he stained her cap and her neckerchief with blood from the wounds in his head. All this so affected Madeleine, so filled her with mingled pity, dismay, sorrow, and resolution that she began to walk towards the mill as bravely as a soldier going under fire. And, heedless that the child was heavy and she so weak she could barely carry her little Jean, she attempted to cross the plank bridge which was quite loose and swayed beneath her feet.

In the middle she stopped. The child had become so heavy that she staggered under his weight, and the sweat ran down her face. She felt as if she would fall from weakness. Suddenly, there came into her mind a lovely and wonderful story she had read the night before in her old book, *The Lives of the Saints*. It was the story of St Christopher carrying the child Jesus across the river and finding him so heavy that he stopped short from fear. She bent to look at the waif. His eyes were closed, he no longer clung to her , either from too much grief or from loss of blood, the poor child had fainted.

MOTHER ZABELLE thought him dead when she saw him thus. Her love revived in her heart, and, thinking no more of the miller, or of the bad old woman, she took the child from Madeleine and began kissing him with cries and tears.

They laid him on their laps at the witer's edge and washed his wounds, staunching the blood with their handkerchiefs, but they were without the means to revive him. Madeleine, pressing his head to her breast, breathed into his face and mouth as one restores the drowning. That brought him back to consciousness, and as soon as he opened his eyes and saw their concern for him he kissed Madeleine and Mother Zabelle one after the other so passionately that they had to stop him for fear he should faint again.

"Come along, come along," said Mother Zabelle, "we must go home. No, never, never could I leave this child. I see that. I won't think of it again. I will keep your ten crowns, Madeleine, so that I can pay this evening if I have to. But don't say anything about it, to-morrow I will go to the woman at Presles so that she won't betray us and get her to say, if need be, that she hasn't given you the money yet for your work. we shall gain time that way, and I will do so well, even if I have to beg, that I will soon be out of your debt, and then you won't be ill-treated because



of me. If you took the child to the mill your husband would kill him you can't take him. Leave him to me, I swear to look after him as well as ever, and, if we are troubled again, we will think of some other way out."

Fate made it easy for the return of the waif to be silent and secret ; for it so happened that Mother Blanchet had just had a stroke before she could tell her son what she had exacted from Mother Zabelle with regard to the waif. And the most important thing for Miller Blanchet was to get hold of a woman to help in the house while Madeleine and the servant nursed his mother. Everything was upside down at the mill for three days. Madeleine did not spare herself and stayed up for three nights at the sick-bed of her mother-in-law, who died in her arms

For a time, this shock calmed the miller's ill temper. He loved his mother as much as he could love anyone, and made a point of giving her the best burial he could afford. He forgot his mistress for the time , he even showed generosity to the extent of giving the dead woman's clothes to poor neighbours Mother Zabelle benefited from this charitable act and even the waif received a few pence. This was because when everyone tried unsuccessfully to obtain the leeches urgently needed for the sick woman, the waif went off and brought some from a pool he knew of without saying a word And all this in less time than it had taken the others to set out.

Cadet Blanchet almost forgot his rancour and no one at the mill knew of Mother Zabelle's project to send the waif back to the foundling hospital. The matter of the ten crowns came up later, for the

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millar had not forgotten to make Mother Zabelle pay the rent of her miserable cottage. But Madeleine pretended to have lost them in the fields, running home after she had heard the news of her mother-in-law's accident. Blanchet hunted for them for a long time and scolded fiercely, but he never discovered how the money had been used, and Mother Zabelle remained unsuspected. From the time of his mother's death Blanchet's character gradually changed without, however, improving. He became still less interested in his home, less observant of what was going on, and less miserly in expenditure. He found things less profitable, however, and, growing fat, lazy, and disorderly, he sought luck in dubious transactions, and took to underhand dealing which might have brought in money if he had not had to pay out with one hand what he earned with the other. His mistress dominated him more every day. She took him to fairs and other gatherings to cheat and trick, they frequented taverns, he learnt to gamble and was often lucky. He had better have lost and thus been sickened of it—for this profligacy proved his undoing—and the least loss made him furious with himself and evilly disposed towards everyone else.

Whilst living this depraved life his wife, always good and sweet, remained at home and brought up their only child lovingly. She looked upon herself as a mother twice over, for she had grown to love the waif very dearly and watched over him almost as much as over her own son. And the more dissolute her husband became, the less she slaved and the happier she grew. At the beginning of his period of debauch he still showed his churlishness, for he was

afraid of reproaches and wanted his wife to remain frightened and submissive. When he saw that it was her nature to detest quarrelling, and that she was not jealous, he decided to leave her alone. As his mother was no longer there to excite him against her, he was able to realise that he could not have had a less exacting wife than Madeleine. He used to be away from home for weeks at a time, coming in one day in the mood to make a scene. His anger died under the patient silence with which she met him ; at first he used to be astonished, but in the end he went straight to sleep. In fact, he was not seen at home except when he was tired and needed repose. To live thus alone with an old maid and two children demanded of Madeleine a Christian spirit, which was perhaps more evident in her than in many a nun. In allowing her to learn to read, and understand what she read, God had been very good to her. She was forced, however, always to read the same things, for she had but two books the Holy Gospel and an abridged edition of the *Lives of the Saints*. The Gospel comforted her and made her weep as she read it alone by her son's bedside in the evenings. The *Lives of the Saints* had another effect on her, like the stories read by people who have nothing better to do stories which fill their heads with imaginings and day-dreams. not that it was really comparable with them, for these stories all gave Madeleine courage and even made her gay. Sometimes in the fields the waif would see her smiling and flushed when the book lay on her lap. This amazed him. He found it hard to realise that the stories which she took the trouble to recite to him, adapting them a little to his under-

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standing (partly also perhaps because she did not altogether understand them herself), could come out of that thing she called a book. He desired to learn to read too, and learned so well and so quickly that Madeleine was astonished. By and by, he was able to teach little Jean. When François reached the age of confirmation Madeleine helped him to learn the catechism, and the cure of their parish was very pleased with the quick wits and good memory of the child, who, however, always passed for a simpleton in the village on account of his slow speech and his timidity. After his first communion, as he was old enough to go into service, Mother Zabelle was glad to send him to the mill. Miller Blanchet made no objection, for it was now clear to everyone that the waif was a good boy, industrious and willing, and stronger, more alert, and more sensible than the other children of his age. Also it was an economy to employ a lad who only asked ten crowns as wages. François was extremely happy to be altogether in the service of Madeleine and his dear little Jeannie, of whom he was very fond. When he realised that the money he earned would pay Mother Zabelle's rent and take a big load off her mind he felt as rich as a king.

Unhappily, poor Mother Zabelle had not long to enjoy this reward. At the beginning of the year she became very ill, and in spite of all the care of the waif and of Madeleine she died on Candlemas Day, after having appeared so much better that they thought her cured. Madeleine regretted her loss and wept a great deal, but she tried to console the poor waif who, had it not been for her, would not have survived this grief.

A year later he was still thinking of her every day and nearly every minute of the day, and once he said to the miller's wife

“When I pray for the soul of my poor mother I feel a sort of repentance for this reason I feel I did not love her enough. I am certain I always did my utmost to please her, I never said any but kind words to her, and I served her in all things as I serve you. But I must confess something to you, Madame Blanchet, something which troubles me and for which I often ask pardon of God. It is that ever since the day my poor mother wanted to send me back to the orphans' home, and when you took my part and prevented her, my love for her grew less in my heart in spite of myself I didn't want it to I would not even allow myself to think she had done wrong in wanting to forsake me It was quite right, I was in the way, she feared your mother-in-law, and actually it was against her own inclinations, for indeed I saw she loved me very much I don't know how it is the idea keeps running in my mind and I cannot get rid of it From the moment you said those words which I shall never forget, I loved you better than her, and do what I might I thought more often of you than of her. Well, she is dead, and I am not dead of grief, as I should be if you died.”

“What were the words I said, my poor child, to make you give me so much affection? I don't remember them”

“You don't remember them?” said the waif sitting at Madeleine's feet she was spinning at her wheel as she listened to him “Well, when you gave my mother the money you said, ‘See! I'll buy that

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child from you, he is mine' And you kissed me and said, 'Now you are no longer a waif, you have a mother who loves you as dearly as if she had brought you into the world' Didn't you say that, Madame Blanchet?"

"Very likely I said what I felt and I feel it still Do you think I have not kept my word?"

"Oh no,—only"

"Only what?"

"No, I won't say It is wrong to grumble, and I don't want to be ungracious and ungrateful"

"I know you can't be ungrateful, and I want you to tell me what you have on your mind Come, what is it that you need to be my child? Say I order you to tell me as I would order Jean"

"Well—it's—it's that you often give Jeannie a kiss and you have never kissed me since the day we were just talking of And I always take care to keep my face and hands clean because I know you don't care for dirty children, and you are for ever washing Jeannie and combing his hair But you don't kiss me any the more for that, and my mother Zabelle hardly ever did either And I see all the other mothers caress their children, and for that I know I am still a waif and you can't forget it"

"Come and kiss me, François," said the miller's wife, taking the child into her lap and kissing his forehead with much emotion "I was wrong never to think of it, and you deserved more from me Look—you see how lovingly I kiss you, and now you are quite sure you are no longer a waif, aren't you?"

The child flung his arms round Madeleine's neck and grew so pale that she was surprised She gently

lifted him down from her knee, trying to distract his attention. But after a moment he was off like a flash, dashing away to hide somewhere. This worried the miller's wife and she went to look for him. She found him on his knees in a corner of the barn.

"Come, come, François," she said, lifting him to his feet, "I don't know what's wrong with you. If you are thinking of poor Mother Zabelle, just say a prayer for her and you will feel calmer."

"No, no," said the child, twisting the hem of Madeleine's overall in his fingers and kissing it with all his strength, "I'm not thinking of my poor mother. Aren't you my mother?"

"What are you crying for, then? You make me unhappy."

"Oh, no! oh, no; I'm not crying," replied François, quickly wiping his eyes and brightening up. "That is I don't know why I'm crying. Truly, I don't know, for I am as happy as if I were in heaven."

FROM that day Madeleine kissed the child night and morning—neither more nor less than as if he had been her own, and the only difference she made between Jeannie and François was that the younger was the more spoiled and petted, as became his age. He was only seven, whereas the waif was twelve, and François understood quite well that a big boy of his age could not be pampered like a baby. Besides, they were even more different in appearance than in age. François was so big and strong, he passed for fifteen, and Jeannie was small and slender like his mother, whose timidity he had inherited as well. In fact, one morning, when François arrived and she greeted him on the doorstep as usual with a kiss, the servant said to her

“To my mind—begging your pardon, ma’am—the lad is too big to let himself be kissed like a little girl.”

“Do you think so?” answered Madeleine in surprised tones. “But don’t you know how old he is?”

“Indeed, I do. I wouldn’t see any harm in it either, save that he is a waif. Why, I, who am only your servant, wouldn’t kiss *that* creature for a good deal.”

“What you say is wrong, Catherine,” replied Madame Blanchet, “and, above all, you had no business to say it in front of the poor child.”



“Let her say it, and let the whole world say it!” retorted François stoutly, “I don’t care As long as I am not a waif to you, Madame Blanchet, I am very happy.”

“My word! listen to that,” said the servant. “That’s the first time I’ve heard him speak at such length. Then you do know how to string three words together, eh, François? Well, I really thought you hadn’t an idea of what one said If I had known you were listening I wouldn’t have said what I did in front of you, for I don’t want to hurt your feelings You are a good boy, quiet and obedient. Come, don’t think any more about it, if I think it queer that our mistress kisses you it is because you seem to me too big for that sort of thing, and that your coaxing ways make you look sillier than you really are”

Having thus remedied the matter, the big woman went off to make the soup and thought no more about it. But the waif followed Madeleine to the washing place and, sitting down beside her, went on talking as if to her, and to her only, he knew how to talk

“Do you remember, Madame Blanchet,” he asked, “once I was here, a long while ago, and you put me to sleep wrapped up in your shawl?”

“Yes, my child,” she replied; “and that was the first time we saw each other.”

“It was the first time, was it? I wasn’t sure. I don’t remember it very well, for when I think about that time it seems like a dream How many years ago is it?”

“It is wait a bit it is about six years ago, because my Jeannie was just fourteen months old.”

“At that rate, I wasn’t as old then as he is now.

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Do you think that when the time comes for him to make his first communion he will remember all that happens now ? ”

“ Oh yes, I will easily remember,” said Jeannie

“ It depends,” went on François “ What were you doing this time yesterday ? ”

Jeannie, surprised, opened his mouth to reply, and instead looked sheepish

“ Well, and you? I’ll bet you don’t know either,” said the miller’s wife to François She often amused herself listening to their chatter

“ I, I ? ” said the waif, embarrassed “ Wait a minute now I went to the fields, I came this way and I thought about you, it was exactly yesterday that I remembered the day you wrapped me in your shawl ”

“ You have a good memory, it is surprising that you can remember as far back And do you remember that you had a fever ? ”

“ No, indeed ”

“ And that you brought my linen to the house without being told ? ”

“ No ”

“ I have always remembered, because by that I knew how good-natured you were ”

“ And I, aren’t I good-natured, mother ? ” asked little Jeannie, offering his mother the half-eaten apple he held

“ Certainly you are, and all the good things you see François do you will do later on ”

“ Yes, yes,” replied the child quickly “ I will get on the bay colt and take it to pasture ”

“ I believe you ! ” laughed François, “ and will you

climb up the big apple tree, and rout the tom-tits out of their nests ? You wait, little silly, till I let you do it. But tell me, Madame Blanchet, I want to ask you something, but I don't know if you will mind telling me."

"Let me hear it "

"It is why do they think they will make me angry by calling me a waif Is it a bad thing to be a waif ? "

"Of course not, my child It is not your fault."

"Whose fault is it, then ? "

"It is the fault of the rich."

"The rich ! How's that ? "

"You're asking me a lot of questions to-day. I will tell you that later on "

"No, no, at once, Madame Blanchet."

"I can't explain it to you. . . First of all, do you yourself know what it is to be a waif ? "

"Yes ; it is to have been put in the foundling hospital by your father and mother because they haven't the means of feeding you and of bringing you up "

"That's it, you see, then, that if there are people so miserably poor that they cannot bring up their children themselves it is the fault of the rich who won't help them "

"Ah ! so it is," answered the waif thoughtfully. "All the same, there are good rich people, for you are one, Madame Blanchet, all one needs is to have the luck to meet them "

The waif, who, ever since he learnt to read and made his first communion, went about musing and seeking reasons for everything, pondered on what Catherine had said to Madame Blanchet But it was no use

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thinking—he could never understand why, because he was growing up, he should not kiss Madeleine. He was the most innocent of boys, and never dreamt of things that lads of his age in the country learn all too quickly. His extreme chastity of mind arose from the fact that he had not been brought up like the others. Because he knew he was a foundling he always felt timid rather than ashamed, and although not feeling it an insult to be called a waif, yet he never got over his astonishment at being different in this respect from everyone about him. Other waifs are almost always humiliated by their lot, and this lot is so early brought home to them that they lose their Christian spirit, and grow up detesting those who brought them into the world, and equally hating those who keep them there. But, as it happened, François had fallen into the hands of Mother Zabelle who loved him and did not ill-treat him, and then he had met Madeleine who was the kindest and most thoughtful creature in the world. She had been to him neither more nor less than a good mother, and a waif who meets with affection is better than other children, just as he is worse when he is bullied and humiliated. François had only found amusement and contentment in Madeleine's company, and instead of playing with the other shepherd boys he grew up solitary or in the company of the two women who loved him. With Madeleine especially he felt as happy as Jeannie could feel, and he had no inclination to seek the company of those who treated him as a waif and with whom he immediately felt, without knowing why, a stranger. He reached the age of fifteen without any knowledge of wrong or any conception of evil, with innocent lips,

and ears deaf to bad words. Moreover, since the day when Catherine had criticised her mistress for the affection she showed him, the child had had the good sense and acute judgment to refrain from the caresses of the miller's wife. He appeared never to think of it, and perhaps he felt ashamed to behave like a little girl and a coxer as Catherine said. But, at bottom, it was not shame which restrained him; and he would have laughed at the idea had he not guessed that the woman he so dearly loved might be reproached for it. Why reproached? He could not explain, and, although he would never be able to find out for himself, he shrank from asking Madeleine to explain it. He realised that she was capable of bearing criticism because she was affectionate and good-natured; for he had a good memory, and remembered that Madeleine had been scolded and in danger of a beating at times for her kindness to him. So that he instinctively avoided being the cause of any revival of her embarrassment. He understood. It is extraordinary, but this poor child understood that a waif has the right only to be loved secretly, and sooner than cause unpleasantness to Madeleine, he would have consented not to be loved at all.

He was reliable at his work, and as he grew older and had more on his hands he saw less of Madeleine. But he did not grieve over this, for he told himself that he was working for her sake and that he would be rewarded by a sight of her at meals. In the evening when Jeannie was asleep and Catherine gone to bed, François stayed up for an hour or two and read or talked to Madeleine as she worked. Country-folk do not read quickly, so that the two books they had

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were enough to content them To read three pages in an evening was a great deal, and when the book was finished a sufficient time had elapsed since the first page for them to begin again without remembering too much of it Besides, there are two ways of reading, and people who think themselves well educated should remember that Those who have plenty of time to themselves and numbers of books imbibe all they can and cram their heads until they are thoroughly confused Those who have neither time nor libraries are glad when a good book falls into their hands They read it over a hundred times without wearying of it, and each time something strikes them which they had missed before At bottom, it is the same notion, but it is so pondered, so well savoured and digested, that the one mind is better nourished and in better condition for that bit alone than thirty thousand brains filled with air and snippets of knowledge What I am saying to you, my children, I got from the cure, and he knows what he is talking about

Well, these two people were content with what they had to consume in the way of knowledge, they consumed it slowly, helping one another to understand and love that which renders us just and good In that way they acquired a fine religion and a great courage They knew no greater happiness than to feel themselves at one with the whole world, and to agree at all times and in all places on the subject of truth and the desire to do right

MILLER Blanchet was no longer so mean over household expenditure, for he set aside the smallest possible sum each month and gave it to his wife. Madeleine could, without annoying him, go short herself and give to those around her whom she knew to be more necessitous than herself. One day a bit of wood, another, half her meal, yet another, vegetables, linen, eggs, and so on. She did her utmost for her neighbours, and when means failed her, she did the work of these poor folk with her own hands and saved them from dying of sickness or overwork. She was economical and mended her garments so carefully that she appeared well-to-do; and besides, as she did not want her own family to suffer for her charity, she fell into a habit of eating practically nothing, never resting, and sleeping as little as possible. The waif observed all this and thought it quite natural; for, of his own accord, as much as by Madeleine's instruction, he felt the same inclination and was drawn toward the same duty. But he grew anxious at the exertions of the miller's wife, and accused himself of sleeping and eating overmuch. He wished he could spend the night sewing and spinning in her stead, and when she wanted to pay him his wages, which had risen to nearly twenty crowns, he became annoyed and insisted on her keeping them, unbeknown to the miller

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"If my mother Zabelle were alive," he said, "that money would be hers. Whatever can I do with money? I have no need of it, for you look after my clothes and provide me with sabots. Keep it, then, for those less fortunate than I. You do so much already for poor folk! Well, if you give me money, you will have to work still more, and if you were to fall ill and die like my poor Zabelle, whatever good would it be to me to have a full money box? Would it bring you back, or prevent me from throwing myself into the river?"

"You don't think what you're saying, my child," Madeleine said to him one day as he spoke again of this idea. "To kill oneself is unchristian, and if I died it would be your duty to go on living to console and support my Jeannie. Well, wouldn't you do it?"

"Yes, so long as Jeannie remained a child and needed my friendship. But afterwards. Don't let's talk of it, Madame Blanchet. I can't be a good Christian in that respect. Don't tire yourself out and die if you want me to go on living on earth."

"Don't worry about it, I have no desire to die, I am quite well. I am hardened to work, and nowadays I am stronger than I used to be in my youth."

"In your youth?" said François, astounded. "Aren't you young still?"

And he feared she might be of an age to die.

"I don't believe I ever had time to be young," answered Madeleine, laughing like someone putting a good face on misfortune, "and now I am twenty five—an age which begins to tell on a woman of my constitution for I was not born robust like you, little one, and my troubles have made me feel older than I am."



“Troubles! Yes, good heavens! I noticed it when Miller Blanchet used to speak to you so severely. Oh! God forgive me I am not really bad, but one day when he raised his arm as if to strike you oh! it was well for him he refrained, for I had seized a flail in my hand nobody was looking and I was just about to fall on him with it But that is ages ago, Madame Blanchet, for I remember that I was a whole head shorter than he and now I can see over *his* head. Nowadays, Madame Blanchet, he says hardly anything to you, and you aren't unhappy, are you?”

“So you think I am no longer unhappy, do you?” said Madeleine a little sharply, thinking that she had never known love in her marriage. But she checked herself, it was nothing to do with the waif and it was not right to put such ideas into a child's head. “You are right,” she said, “I am not unhappy any longer. I live as I please. My husband is much kinder to me, my son is getting on well and I have nothing to complain of”

“And I? You don't include me in your reckoning? I . . . I . . .”

“Well, you are getting on nicely too and that gives me much pleasure”

“Don't I please you, in any other way, though?”

“Yes, you are well-behaved, you are sensible about everything, and I am very pleased with you.”

“Oh, if you were not satisfied with me, what a queer fellow, what a good-for-nothing I should be after all you have done for me. But there is something else which ought to make you happy if you think as I do.”

“Well, tell me; for I can't imagine what mystery you are getting up to surprise me.”

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"No mystery, Madame Blanchet I have only to examine myself and I see something, that is, that even if I suffered from hunger, thirst, heat, or cold, and if I were beaten nearly to death every day into the bargain, suppose I had no more than a bundle of thorns or a heap of stones for a bed—Well, do you see what I mean?"

"I think so, my François, you wouldn't be unhappy in spite of all that misery, provided your heart was at peace with God"

"There's that, and that goes without saying But I really meant something else"

"I don't follow you, I see you are cleverer than I am"

"No, I'm not clever I mean I would endure all the pains a man living this mortal life might have to bear, and would still be happy in thinking that Madeleine Blanchet is fond of me And that's why I said just now that if you thought the same, you would say François loves me so much I am glad to be alive"

"You are right, my dear boy," replied Madeleine, "and the things you say sometimes make me feel like weeping Yes, truly your affection for me is one of the joys of my life, and perhaps the greatest after

No, I mean *with* my Jeannie's As you are older than he is you understand better what I say, and you can tell me your own thoughts better I assure you I never feel weary with you two, and I ask only one thing of God now, and that is that we may stay long as we are without being parted"

"Without being parted, I should hope so!" said François "I would rather be cut in bits than leave you Who else would love me as you do? Who else

would risk being ill-treated for the sake of a poor waif and call him her child, her dear son for you often, nearly always, call me that. And when we are alone you often say: Call me 'mother' and not always Madame Blanchet. But I daren't, because I am afraid of falling into the habit and of letting it out in front of somebody."

"Well, what of it?"

"Oh, they would grumble at you, and I don't want you to get into trouble on my account. I'm not proud, I tell you. I don't care if no one knows you have raised me from being a waif. It makes me happy enough to know for myself that I have a mother whose child I am. Oh, you mustn't die, Madame Blanchet," added poor François, gazing sadly at her, for he had felt unhappy about this for some time. "I wouldn't have anybody on earth who cared for me if I lost you; you would go to Heaven and I am not sure that I am fit to follow you there."

In all he said and thought François seemed to have a presage of ill, and a short while after this ill befell him.

He had become the miller's assistant. He went on horseback to fetch the grain from the customers and took it back to them ground to flour. That meant he often had long journeys to make and that he went to Blanchet's mistress who lived a couple of miles from the mill. He disliked this particular errand, and never stayed a minute in the house after his corn had been weighed and measured . . .

At this point the story-teller stopped.

"Do you realise how long I have been speaking?"

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she asked the listening villagers "I haven't such good lungs as I had at fifteen, and it's my opinion that the hemp dresser knows the facts better than I, and could well take up my story Especially as I have come to a part I don't remember so well "

"I know well why your memory has become defective in the middle of the tale," said the hemp-dresser, "it is because the waif began to have bad luck just then, and that upsets you, for, like all pious folk, you are soft-hearted over love stories "

"Is it going to turn into a love story then ?" asked Sylvine Courtioux, who happened to be there

"Ah ! there you are !" cried the hemp dresser, "I knew very well that word would make the young ladies prick up their ears But be patient, the place where I take up the tale in order to lead up to a happy ending does not tell you what you want to hear Where did you stop, Mother Monique ? "

"It was about Blanchet's mistress "

"Ah, that's right," said the hemp dresser "This woman was named Severe, but her name was not very suitable, for there was nothing like that in her make up She knew very well how to wheedle the men when she wanted to see the glint of their money in the sun You couldn't call her wicked, for she was of a jolly and care-free nature, but she kept all her gains for herself and never bothered about anyone else so long as she was smartly dressed and made much of She had been the rage in those parts, and it was said that she found too many folk to her liking She was still a good-looking woman, very attractive and lively, though rather plump, and rosy as a cherry She took little notice of the waif, and if she chanced to meet

him in her barn or yard she twitted him without ill-will, just for the amusement of seeing him blush, for he blushed like a girl and felt uncomfortable whenever she addressed him. He thought her bold, and she seemed to him ugly and evil, although she was neither in reality—at least her ill-temper only appeared when she was crossed in her affairs, or when her vanity was ruffled. and it is only fair to say that she liked to give as well as to receive. She was ostentatiously generous and enjoyed receiving people's gratitude. But to the waif's way of thinking only a devil could reduce Madame Blanchet to such poverty and drudgery.

When, however, the waif was in his seventeenth year Madame Sévère discovered that he was extremely handsome. He did not resemble the other country children who are thick-set and dumpy at that age, and only develop into something worth looking at two or three years later. He was tall and well-made, with a white skin, even at harvesting time, and curly hair, dark at the roots and golden on top.

(Do you like that kind, Madame Monique the hair, I mean, not the boy ?

“Mind your own business!” retorted the curé's servant, “and get on with the story.”)

He was always poorly dressed, but he loved cleanliness as Madeleine Blanchet had taught him to be clean, and he had an air about him which the others had not. Madame Sévère gradually realised this, and she was so well aware of it in the end that she resolved to draw him out a bit. She had no prejudices, and when she heard people say, “It is a shame such a handsome boy should be a waif,” she answered: “Waifs

## THE COUNTRY WAIF

have every reason to be beautiful, for they are love-children " She devised the following plan to get him to herself She made Blanchet drunk at the fair at St Denis-de-Jouhet, and when she saw he was incapable of staggering home she sent him to bed at a friend's house near by Then she said to François, who had come with his master to drive the cattle to the fair, " I'll leave my mare for your master to get home on to morrow, my boy, you had better ride his and take me on the pillion as far as my house "

This idea was not at all to François' taste He protested that his master's mare was not strong enough to carry two people, and he offered to escort Madame Severe, she on her animal and he on Blanchet's, he said he would return immediately with another horse and take good care to be at St Denis de-Jouhet early the next morning but Madame Severe took no heed of him and ordered him to obey her François was afraid of her, for as Blanchet did all she said she could have got him dismissed from the mill if he offended her—especially as it was near St John's term He took her on his pillion, thinking, poor lad, that it was the best way out of the difficulty

WHEN they set out it was dusk, and when they reached the sluice-gate of the pool at Rochefolle it was pitch dark. The moon had not risen above the trees, and in those parts the roads are cut up by the springs and are not at all good. But François spurred the mare and went fast, for he was sick of Madame Sévère and longed to be with Madame Blanchet.

But Madame Sévère, who was in no hurry to reach her destination, began to act the fine lady and to say that she was afraid and that the mare ought to walk for she could hardly lift her feet and risked falling on her knees.

“Bah!” returned François without paying any attention, “that would be the first time she said her prayers, for I never saw a less pious mare!”

“You are very witty, François,” giggled Madame Sévère, as though François had said something new and amusing.

“Indeed I am not,” replied the waif, thinking she was making fun of him.

“Come, you aren’t going to let her go downhill at a trot, I should hope.”

“Don’t get alarmed! I intend to take it at the trot.”

Their speed made the buxom Madame Sévère quite breathless and prevented her from talking.

## THE COUNTRY WAIF

This vexed her for she counted on wheedling the young man. But she did not want him to see that she was neither young enough nor slight enough to endure the strain, so she held her tongue for a while. When they reached a chestnut wood, however, she bethought herself of saying

"Stop, François, you'll have to get down, my dear François, the mare has cast a shoe!"

"Even if she had," retorted François, "I have neither hammer nor nails to re shoe her."

"But you mustn't lose the shoe. They cost a lot. Get down, I tell you, and look for it."

"By Jove! I could search a couple of hours without finding it among these ferns. And my eyes aren't lanterns either."

"Any way, François," said Madame Severe half joking, half affectionately, "your eyes shine like glow-worms."

"So you can see them through the back of my hat?" returned François, ruffled by what he took to be mockery.

"I can't see them now," said Madame Severe with a sigh as heavy as herself, "but I have often seen them at other times!"

"They have never had anything to tell you," responded the waif innocently. "You might leave them alone, for they have never offended you and never will either."

["I fancy," remarked the cure's servant at this point, "that you can skip the next bit. It isn't very interesting to hear of all this bad woman's wicked attempts to upset our waif's religious notions"]



"Don't worry, Mother Monique," answered the hemp-dresser; "I will miss out anything unnecessary. I am aware I am speaking before young folk, and I won't say a word too many.

"We had got to where Madame Sévère was anxious to bring a less innocent look into François eyes than that he boasted about"]

"How old are you now, François?" she asked him with politeness, so as to show him she did not want to treat him like a youngster.

"Oh gracious! I don't know exactly," replied the waif, who began to see through her little games "I don't often bother to count up my days!"

"They say you are only seventeen," she went on, "but I bet you are twenty, for you are tall, and you will soon be having a beard."

"I don't care either way," yawned François.

"Hallo! you're going too fast, my lad. I've lost my purse now."

"The deuce you have," snapped François, who had not realised the full extent of her cunning. "I suppose you will have to get down and look for it probably it is valuable."

He jumped down and helped her to dismount; she took the opportunity of leaning on him and he found her heavier than one of his sacks of corn.

She pretended to hunt for the purse which was in her pocket, and he went on five or six paces leading the mare.

"Oh! won't you help me to look?" she cried.

"I must hold the mare," he answered, "because she is thinking of her colt and will run off if I leave go the bridle"

## THE COUNTRY WAIF

Madame Severe looked about for her purse beneath the mare's feet close to François, and he jumped to the fact that she had lost nothing unless indeed her wits had gone astray

"We hadn't got as far as here," he said, "when you shouted about your purse, so you won't be likely to find it hereabouts"

"You think it's a put-up job then, you sly rogue," she cried, trying to pull his ear, "for I believe you are a rogue"

But François drew back and would not fool with her

"No, no," he said, "since you have discovered your bag let's be off, for I'd rather go to sleep than romp about"

"Well, then, we'll chat," said Madame Severe when she was up behind him again "They say that beguiles the tedium of the road"

"I don't need to be beguiled," replied the waif "I'm not bored at all"

"That's the first nice thing you've said, François!"

"If it was complimentary it was said without intention for I don't know how to pay compliments"

Madame Severe began to get furious, but she was not ready to resort to the truth "This boy must be a perfect simpleton," she said to herself "If I made him lose his way he would have to stop with me a while"

And she tried to misdirect him, and to guide him to the left when he wanted to go to the right

"You're straying," she told him, "it's the first time you've been this way—I know it better than you Listen to me or you'll make me spend the night in the woods, young man"

But when François had been over a road only once he remembered it so well that he could have found his way a year later.

“No, no,” he replied, “this is the way. I’m not cracked. The mare knows the road very well too, and I don’t want to spend the night rambling about in the woods.”

So it was they reached Dollins, the place where Madame Sévère lived, having wasted less than a quarter of an hour. And François had taken absolutely no heed of the woman’s cajoleries.

When they arrived she tried to keep him on the pretext that the night was too dark, that the floods were out, and the fords swollen. But the waif cared not a jot for such dangers, and, bored with such senseless chatter, tightened his stirrups, set his horse at a gallop without listening to another word, and raced back to the mill where Madeleine awaited him, perturbed by the delay.

**T**HE waif told Madeline nothing of what Madame Severe had given him to understand. He dared not, indeed he dared not even think about it. I don't say I would have been so prudent as he in such circumstances, but, any way, prudence doesn't do any harm, and I only tell you what actually happened. This lad was as well behaved as an innocent girl.

But thinking it over that night Madame Severe felt offended with him and told herself he was probably more contemptuous than foolish. This idea set her brain afire and made her blood boil, thoughts of revenge surged into her mind.

She planned to such effect that when Cadet Blanchet returned only partly sobered she gave him to understand that his assistant was an insolent young whippersnapper. She said she had to slap his face to keep him in check, for he had taken it into his head to make love to her and kiss her as they returned by night through the woods.

This was more than enough to upset Blanchet, but she was not yet content, and jeered at him for leaving a likely lad of captivating manners in the house with his wife. Blanchet became jealous at once of his mistress and of his wife. He took his stick, jammed his hat down over his eyes like an extinguisher over a candle, and dashed off to the mill without pausing for breath.

Luckily the waif was out. Blanchet had bought a tree from Blanchard of Guerin which the waif had to fell and cut up into logs : he would not be home before evening. Blanchet would have gone after him at his work save that he feared if he showed any spite the young millers of Guerin would make a laughing-stock of him and his jealousy which hardly seemed to fit in with his ill-treatment and neglect of his wife. He would have waited in for him, but that being at home bored him. The quarrel he wanted to pick with his wife could not hold out all day ; you can't go on being angry when the ill-temper is all on your side. However, he could have got over the mockery and endured the boredom for the pleasure of giving the poor waif a sound drubbing, had not his walk sobered him somewhat and brought him to the realisation that the waif was no longer a child, and a young man old enough to fall in love is old enough to use his fists in self-defence.

These considerations induced him to try to pull himself together, as he drank his pint in silence, and revolved in his head a tirade against his wife, unable to decide how to begin.

He said sourly as he came in that he wished to speak to her, and she waited in her usual attitude, sad, silent, and with a touch of proud reserve.

"Madame Blanchet," he said at last, "I want to give you an order which you wouldn't need if you were the woman you set up to be !"

Therewith he stopped short as if to draw breath but actually because he was half ashamed of what he was about to say, for innocence was as clearly inscribed on his wife's face as a prayer in a Book of Hours

## THE COUNTRY WAIF

Madeleine did not help him out at all. She made no sign, awaiting the end of his speech, expecting a reproach for some item of expenditure, and never dreaming of his real complaint.

"You behave as if you didn't understand me, Madame Blanchet," went on the miller. "As a matter of fact my meaning is perfectly obvious. I intend to throw *that* out, and the sooner the better, for I've had altogether too much of it."

"Throw what?" asked Madeleine, astounded.

"Throw *what*! You don't dare to say throw *whom*?"

"Great heavens! no. I don't know what you mean," she said. "Talk sense if you want me to understand you."

"You'll make me lose my temper," cried Cadet Blanchet, bellowing like a bull. "I tell you that waif is not wanted in my house. If he is still about to-morrow morning I'll turn him out by dint of using my fists—unless he prefers to get under my mill wheel."

"What wicked words, and what evil ideas, Miller Blanchet!" said Madeleine, in spite of herself growing as white as her cap. "You will end up by ruining your business if you send the lad away, for you will never find anyone to do your job so well for so little pay. Besides, what has the poor boy done that you want to dismiss him so unkindly?"

"He makes me look a fool, I tell you, my good dame, and I won't be made the laughing-stock of the countryside. He has become the master in my house and he merits a good cudgelling for what he has done."

It took a little time for Madeleine to grasp her husband's meaning. She had not an idea of it, and

brought him all the arguments she could think of against this caprice. But she might have saved herself the trouble; he only became the more enraged. Seeing that it would grieve her to lose her good retainer François, he grew jealous again and said such cruel things that she understood at last and began to weep for shame, hurt pride, and deep sorrow.

This aggravated matters still further; Blanchet swore that she must be in love with the product of the foundling hospital, that he blushed for her, and that if she did not turn the waif out without delay he would beat to him death and grind him to powder.

To which she replied, raising her voice more than usual, that he was the master and could dispense with whose services he pleased but that he had no right to insult an honest woman, and that she cried to God and His angels to witness an injustice too great and too heavy to bear. This led her, against her will, to reproach him for his own misconduct and confront him with the truth that those who live in glass houses have no right to throw stones

This luckless speech of Madeleine's made Blanchet more furious still, for he saw that he was in the wrong. He threatened to stop her mouth with a blow of his fist and he would have done so had not Jeannie, drawn by the noise, thrown himself between them without knowing the cause of their quarrel. He was pale and upset at hearing such an uproar. Blanchet attempted to dismiss him and he wept, upon which his father called him badly brought up, a cry-baby, and a coward, and said his mother would make nothing of him. Then he got up truculently, slashing his cane and swearing that he would slay the waif.

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Madeline, seeing him in such a violent rage, flung herself before him so boldly that he was taken by surprise and did not resist her she snatched the stick from his hand and threw it into the river Then, without any of her habitual meekness, she said "Nothing will be gained by following up your wicked impulse When you lose your head you are liable to bring trouble upon yourself, and if you have no feeling for others, at least think of yourself and of the possible consequences of a wicked action For some time, my good husband, you have led an evil life and you are fast heading to a bad end I want to stop you, at any rate to day, from committing a sin for which you would be punished both in this world and the next You shall not kill anyone You can go back to where you came from rather than seek to revenge an insult you have never received Go away now—I give you a command in your own interests and for the first time in my life You will have to listen to it, and you are bound to see that in so doing I don't lose the respect I owe you I swear to you on my honour that the waif will not be here to morrow and that you can come back without fear of meeting him "

So saying, Madeleine opened the house door for her husband, and Cadet Blanchet, utterly dumbfounded at this change in her demeanour, and, at bottom, pleased with this way out and Madeleine's submission, replaced his hat on his head, and without another word returned to Madame Severe To her and her friends he boasted of having thrashed his wife and the boy, but, disbelieving him, Madame Severe felt no particular pleasure

When Madeleine Blanchet was left alone she sent



Jeannie out to the fields in charge of the flocks and the goat, and she herself went down to the mill-gate. There was a patch of ground there, islanded by rivulets from the mill-stream, and covered with tree trunks so overgrown with branches and fresh shoots as to form a thick screen. Madeleine often went there to pray, for no one disturbed her and she could hide among the tall weeds as a moor-hen hides in her nest of green twigs.

As soon as she reached this spot she knelt down to pray. Madeleine's prayers brought her much relief and comfort ; but now she could think of nothing save the poor waif she was bidden to dismiss, this child who loved her so much that he would surely die away from her. She could not pray, and felt desperate at the thought of losing her only support and parting from the child of her heart. She wept so long and so bitterly that it is a miracle she revived ; her sobs choked her, and she fell at last senseless on the ground and lay there over an hour. At nightfall, however, she tried to recover herself, and hearing Jeannie return, singing, with his flock, she got up and went home to prepare the supper. A little later she heard the oxen returning with Blanchet's oak-logs, and Jeannie rushed gladly out to greet his friend François, whom he had missed all day. Poor little Jeannie had been miserable at the sight of his father's furious gesture against his beloved mother, and in the fields he had wept over it, without knowing the cause of their quarrel. But a child's sorrow and the dew on the grass soon vanish and Jeannie thought no more about it. Taking François' hand and frisking about like a young rabbit, he led him in to Madeleine.

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François noticed Madeleine's red eyes and pale face at once "Heavens ! " he said to himself, " something bad has happened in the house," and he paled and trembled in sympathy, watching her and awaiting an explanation But Madeleine made him sit down and gave him his supper without saying a word , he could not swallow a mouthful Jeannie ate and chattered alone, and felt quite comforted, for his mother kissed him from time to time and encouraged him to eat When he was in bed, and while the servant tidied the room, Madeleine went out, signing to François to follow, She crossed the meadow and went to the fountain , there, taking her courage in both hands, she said to him

" My child, unhappiness has befallen us, and God wills that we should be severely chastised See how miserable I am, and, if you love me, be brave, for if you don't help me I don't know what will become of me "

François little guessed the truth, although he supposed at once that it was something to do with Blanchet

" What are you talking about ? " he asked Madeleine, kissing her hands as if she were indeed his mother " How can you think I would fail to support and comfort you ? Am I not your servant for the rest of my life ? Am I not your child who will work for you, and who is strong enough to provide for your needs ? Leave Miller Blanchet out of the question, let him spend everything on himself if he wants to I'll feed and clothe you, you and Jeannie If necessary I'll leave you for a while I'll go and hire myself out—but not far away, you may be sure , I should see

you each day, and come over for the day on Sundays. I am strong enough now to work and earn the needful amount. You are so modest and require so little! Well, now, you won't have to deprive yourself for others so much and you will be better off. Come now, Madame Blanchet, my dear mother, calm yourself and don't cry, for if you cry I think I shall die of grief."

Madeleine, seeing that he did not guess the truth, and that she must enlighten him, commended her soul to God and sought to prepare herself for inflicting so much pain on the poor waif.

“FRANÇOIS, my son,” she said, “that isn’t it My husband is not ruined yet as far as I know the state of his business, and if fear of want was all my trouble you would not find me so upset People fit to work have no need to fear poverty Since I must tell you why I am heartsick—it is that Miller Blanchet has set himself against you and will no longer have you in the house”

“Oh! it is that, is it?” said François, getting to his feet “Well, then, let him kill me at once, for in any case I can’t survive such a blow Yes, let him end my days, for I have been in his way a long while and I know he wishes me dead Tell me where he is I want to find him and to say to him ‘Why do you wish to be rid of me?’ Perhaps I can overcome your wicked reasons—and if you are still determined, say so, so that—so that—I don’t know what I am saying, Madeleine, honestly I don’t know, I don’t understand myself and I don’t know what I’m doing My heart is numbed and my head whirls, either I am about to die or to go crazy”

And the poor waif flung himself down and beat his head with his fists as he had done the day Mother Zabelle tried to take him back to the foundling hospital Seeing this, courage returned to Madeleine She took his hands, his arms, and shook him violently to force him to listen to her

“If you have no more will and resignation than a child,” she said to him, “you do not deserve the love I give you and you will make me ashamed of having brought you up as my son. Get up! You are a man, remember, and a man can’t roll on the ground like that. Listen to me, François, and tell me if you love me enough to overcome your grief and not to see me for a little while. You see, my child, it is to ensure my peace, and for my honour, otherwise my husband will cause me shame and suffering. Thus, for very love of me you must leave me to-day, as I have kept you until now for love of you. Love is shown in different ways according to time and circumstance. You must leave me at once, for, to stop the miller from doing something wrong, I have given my word that you shall be gone by to-morrow morning. To-morrow is St. John’s term and you must go and hire yourself out not too near here either, for if we often saw each other it would increase Miller Blanchet’s idea.”

“But what is his idea, Madeleine? What is his complaint against me? How have I misbehaved myself? Does he still think you rob the house to help me? That’s impossible, for I am now in the house. I don’t eat more than I need and I never steal a pin. Perhaps he thinks I keep my wages and that it costs too much. Well! let me follow up my idea of going to talk to him and explain that since poor Mother Zabelle died I have taken not a farthing from you, or if you prefer that I don’t tell him that and indeed, if I did, he would want to force you to return all the wages which you gave away in charity well, I shall make his proposition for next term: I will offer to

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work for him for nothing! In that way he can't complain of anything and he will let me stay near you."

"No, no, no, François," replied Madeleine quickly, "that won't do at all, and if you said that to him he would fall into a rage with you and me which would lead to some misfortune."

"But why, on earth?" asked François. "What's the matter with him? Is it only for the pleasure of making us unhappy that he invents these suspicions?"

"My dear child, don't ask me why he is against you, I can't tell you. I would feel too much ashamed of him, and it would be better for us all if you didn't try to guess it. All I can tell you is that it is fulfilling your duty towards me to go. You are grown up now and strong. You can get on without me, and besides, you will earn more elsewhere, for here you won't take anything from me. Every child leaves his mother and goes out to work—many go far away. You will do as the others do, and I will be as unhappy as other mothers, I will weep, I will think about you, pray for you morning and night."

"Yes, and you will take another servant who won't look after you nor safeguard your son and your property, who may even hate you if Miller Blanchet forbids him to listen to you, and who will repeat all your good deeds to him twisting them till they appear bad. You will be miserable, and I will no longer be there to defend and console you! Ah! you think I am without courage because I am unhappy? You imagine I think only of myself and you tell me that I shall benefit by being away! I don't think of myself in any of this. What do I care

if I gain or lose ? I don't care to know how I shall control my grief. I don't care if I live or die it is as God wills, and I am indifferent since I can no longer live for you. What gives me pain and what I can't bear is, that I see you will have to suffer. You will be down-trodden now, they are only sending me away in order that they may do as they wish with you "

" If God allows it to be," said Madeleine, " we must suffer what we cannot prevent. One should not make things worse by fretting against them. You know how unhappy I am do you think it would make me happier to know you were ill, sick of life, and refusing consolation ? Instead it would soothe me more to know that you are behaving well and keeping yourself healthy and courageous because you are fond of me "

This last good reason won the waif over ; he promised, on his knees as in confessional, to do his best to bear his trouble bravely.

" Well, then," he said, wiping his eyes, " I will go off early and I will say good-bye here, my dear mother Madeleine ! Good-bye for ever, perhaps, for you did not say that I might see you again and talk to you If you think I ought not to have that happiness again don't say so or I shall lose the courage to live Leave me the hope that I shall find you again one day at this clear fountain where for the first time I found you nearly eleven years ago. From that day to this I have had nothing but happiness And I won't forget all the joy I owe to God and you. I'll remember it to help me from to-morrow onwards to take things as they come. I go broken-hearted and sick with grief thinking of the unhappy state I leave

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you in, and that in leaving you I rob you of your best friend, but you tell me that if I don't try to be comforted you will be still more miserable. Therefore, I will console myself as best I can by thinking about you, and I value your friendship too much to wish to lose it by cowardice. Good-bye, Madame Blanchet, leave me alone here for a little, I shall be better when I have wept my fill. If my tears fall in the fountain you will think of me every time you come to do your washing. I want to gather some mint to put among my linen for I am going soon to pack my things, and every time I smell the mint I shall fancy I am here and that I see you. Good-bye, good bye, my dear mother, I don't want to go back to the house. I could quite well kiss my Jeannie without waking him—but I haven't the courage. Kiss him for me, please, and so that he shan't weep for me, tell him to-morrow that I'll be back soon. Then he will forget me a bit while expecting me back, and by and by you will talk to him of his poor François so that he won't entirely forget me. Give me your blessing, Madeleine, as you did on the day of my first communion. I need it that God's grace may be on me."

And the poor waif knelt down saying that if ever he had unwittingly offended her he asked her pardon.

Madeleine swore that she had nothing to forgive, and gave him her blessing, ardently wishing she could make it as powerful as a blessing from God.

"And now," said François, "now I am becoming a waif again and no one will love me any more—won't you kiss me as you kissed me—it was a special privilege—on the day of my first communion? I shall need



to remind myself of all that to be sure that in your heart you will continue to be a mother to me."

Madeleine kissed the child as she used to kiss him when he was little. Nevertheless, if anyone had seen it Miller Blanchet would have been considered just in his behaviour, and this good woman with no thoughts of evil would have been criticised, though the Virgin Mary saw no ill in her act.

["Nor do I," said the curé's servant.

"And I still less," rejoined the hemp-dresser. And he went on.]

She went back to the house, but did not sleep a wink that night. She heard François come in to do up his bundle in the next room, and heard him go out at the peep of day. She did not move until he had gone a good way so that her courage should not fail her, and when she heard him crossing the little bridge she cautiously set the door ajar without letting herself be seen so that she might see him once more from afar. She watched him pause and glance at the river and the mill as if to say farewell to them. Then he went quickly on after plucking a poplar leaf, which he put in his hat as is the custom to show that one is seeking a place.

Miller Blanchet came home at midday. He said nothing until his wife remarked :

"Well, you must go and hire someone to help in the mill, for François has gone and so you are without a servant"

"That's enough, wife," replied Blanchet, "I'm going ; but I warn you not to count on a young one."

That was all the thanks she got for giving in, and so hurt was she that she could not help showing it.

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"Cadet Blanchet," she said, "I obeyed your wishes, I have sent away a good person for no reason, and—I don't hide it from you—against my will I don't ask you to be grateful to me, but, in my turn, I give you an order—it is that you don't insult me, for I have done nothing to deserve it"

She said this in a way that Blanchet was unused to, and it had its effect on him

"Come, my dear," he said, holding out his hand to her, "let's make peace on this score and think no more about it Perhaps I was a little hasty in my words, but you know I had my reasons for mistrusting that waif The devil sends these brats into the world, and he is always at their heels When they are good in one way they are bad in another Thus, though I daresay it will not be easy to find such a hard worker—the devil had whispered wantonness into his ear, and I know one woman who has cause to complain of this"

"That woman is not your wife," replied Madeleine, "and very likely she lied Even if she spoke the truth you would have no reason for suspecting me"

"Do I suspect you?" said Blanchet, shrugging his shoulders "My grudge was against him, and now he is gone I'll think no more about it If I said something you didn't like it was said in jest"

"Such jests are not to my taste," replied Madeleine, "keep them for those who appreciate them"

AT first Madeleine Blanchet bore her sorrow fairly well. She learnt from her new servant, who had met François at the hiring-fair, that the waif had hired himself for eighteen crowns a year to a farmer near Aigurande who owned a large mill and a good deal of land. She was glad to hear he had found a good situation, and did her best to return to her usual occupations without regretting him too deeply. But in spite of herself her sorrow was great, and she was ill for a long while with a mild fever, the effects of which were so gradual that no one noticed her illness. François had been right in saying that his absence robbed her of her best friend. She grew weary of her loneliness and lack of people to talk to. She petted her son Jeannie still more, and indeed he was truly a nice lad, with no more harm in him than a lamb.

But besides the fact that he was too young to understand all she could have told François, he did not look after her or show her the attentions François had at that age. Jeannie loved his mother, even more than children usually do, for she was a far better mother than most. But he was never astonished or moved by her generosity as François was. He took it for granted that she should love him and caress him so faithfully. He took it as his due, and counted on it as a right; whereas the waif was grateful for the

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smallest attention and showed his gratitude by his behaviour, his words and looks, his blushes and tears, so that with him Madeleine forgot that she had neither rest, nor love, nor comfort in her household. Her unhappiness returned when she was left alone to ponder all the troubles from which that friendship had shielded her. There was no longer anyone to read with her, to care for the poor with her, to pray as she did, and even to joke with her from time to time good-humouredly and innocently. Things she saw, things she did, no longer interested her, only reminding her of the time when she had had a gentle and friendly companion. Whether she went to the vineyard, the orchard, the mill, there was no corner she had not passed ten thousand times with that child hanging on to her skirts or that brave, eager servant at her side. It was as if she had lost a dear and promising son and, however much she loved the remaining one, part of her love went begging.

Her husband, seeing her unwell and pitying her sadness and weariness, feared that she might become really ill, he did not want to lose her, for she looked after his affairs well and saved as much as he himself wasted. As Madame Severe would not let him go to the mill, he realised that unless Madeleine had charge of that side of his affairs he would soon be ruined. Although reprimanding her from habit and complaining that she was not careful enough, he realised that no one else would serve him so well.

He set himself to find a companion to amuse and assist her, and it so happened that on the death of an uncle the care of his youngest sister, who had been

under his guardianship, now fell upon Blanchet. He had thought of sending her to live with Madame Sévère, but his other relatives shamed him out of such a plan. Besides which, when Madame Sévère saw a promising young beauty in her fifteenth year, she was not in the least desirous of having the care of her, and told Blanchet that she was afraid of the risks attendant on the guardianship of so young a girl. Blanchet, therefore, knowing it would be a profitable affair to take charge of his sister the uncle who brought her up had left her money in his will and not caring to confide her to other relatives, brought her to his mill and presented her to his wife as a sister and a companion. He said she was to learn to work and to help in the house, but that Madeleine was not to make her tasks so disagreeable that she would seek to live elsewhere.

Madeleine willingly agreed to this arrangement. Mariette Blanchet took her fancy on account of the beauty which was so distasteful to Madame Sévère. She thought a lovely face to be a sure indication of a charm of mind and good nature. She welcomed the girl rather as a daughter who might perhaps replace poor François than as a sister.

Meanwhile poor François endured his ill-luck as patiently as possible, considering it was about the worst that could have befallen any man or child. It was probably fortunate for him that he fell sick under the strain, for it proved the kindness of his master's family who kept him at home instead of sending him to the hospital, and nursed him carefully. This miller was very unlike Blanchet, and his daughter a woman of thirty not yet married had a reputation of being

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charitable and good-hearted And these people realised that, in spite of the accident of his ill-health, the waif was a real treasure

He was so sturdy and able-bodied that he recovered more quickly than another would have done, and even though he started work before he was fit he did not have a relapse

His conscience urged him to make up for lost time and pay back the kindness of his masters, though for a couple of months he suffered from the effects of his illness, and when he began work each morning he felt as dazed as if he had fallen from a housetop But he gradually recovered and he never liked to mention the pain it cost him to set about work They were soon so pleased with him that they entrusted him with various jobs above his province Since he could read and write they made him keep accounts, which no one had been able to do before—to the detriment of the business at the mill

He was well off in spite of his sorrow, and as he had wisely refrained from mentioning his origin no one derided him for being a waif But neither kind treatment, nor his work, nor his illness could make him forget Madeleine, the dear old mill at Cormoner, his little Jeannie, or the cemetery where Mother Zabelle was buried His heart was far away, and on Sundays he did nothing but brood and so found no repose after the weekly toil He was so far from home—more than sixteen miles away—that he never received news of it He thought at first that he would get used to this, but he was consumed with anxiety, and he discovered ways of obtaining information about Madeleine at least twice a year He used to

frequent fairs, looking out for an acquaintance from the old place, and when he met one he made inquiries about all his friends, beginning prudently with those he cared for least, and concluding with Madeleine who interested him most. thus he got news of her and her family.

But it's growing late, friends, and I'm yawning over my story. I'll tell you the rest to-morrow, if you like. Good night, everybody.

And the hemp-dresser went off to bed, while the farm-labourer lit his lantern and escorted Mother Monique back to the parsonage, for she was an old woman and could not see the way very well.

THE next day we again gathered at the farm, and the hemp dresser resumed his tale —

François stayed about three years in a fine mill called Haultchampault, Baschampault, or Frechampault (for in those parts as in ours “champault” is a common name), near Villechiron in the Aigurande district. I have been round about there twice, and found it a lovely and fertile part. The country folk are more prosperous, better housed and well-dressed, plenty of business is done, and though the soil is scantier the crops are better. But the ground there is rougher. It is cut up by rocks and cleft by streams. But it is pretty and charming there all the same. The trees are wondrously beautiful, and the two Creuses run babbling through their channels as clear as crystal springs.

The mills there are of more consequence than ours, and the one where François lived was among the largest and best. One winter’s day, his master, whose name was Jean Vertaud, said to him

“François, my friend and servant, I have a few words to say to you. Pray listen carefully. We have known each other some time, you and I, and I don’t want to hide the fact that if more money has been coming in, if my mill is prosperous and I have done better than my neighbours, if—to cut a long story short—I have been able to increase my worldly goods,



it is due to you. You have assisted me not as a servant, but as a friend and relative. You studied my interests as if they were your own. You managed my affairs as I should never be able to do, and throughout you have shown greater knowledge and understanding than I possess. I am over-credulous by nature, and I should have been perpetually cheated if you hadn't managed everybody and everything around me. Those who were in the habit of abusing my good nature grumbled, but you bore the brunt boldly, and in so doing exposed yourself more than once to dangers which you always overcame by your courage and kindness. What particularly pleases me is that you are as good-natured as you are willing and intelligent. You like scrupulousness but not avarice. You don't allow people to cheat you like me, and yet, like me, you are ready to give anyone a helping hand. You are the first to beg me to assist those actually in want. You have prevented rogues from deceiving me. And for a country fellow you are well-educated, you have brains and sense. Your ideas are always successful, and everything you put your hand to turns out well.

"I am very pleased with you, and I would gladly do you a good turn. Tell me frankly if there is anything you wish me to do for you whatever it is I won't refuse."

"I don't know why you suggest that," answered François, "it seems to me you must think me discontented, and I assure you that is not so."

"I don't say you're discontented. But there is something in your expression and manner which shows you aren't really happy. You aren't at all gay, you

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never laugh, you never enjoy yourself You are so quiet one would think you in mourning for someone ”

“ Are you annoyed with me for that, sir ? In that respect I can’t oblige you I dislike drinking and dancing I never go to inns or to parties , I don’t know any songs or funny stories Nothing which distracts me from work gives me any pleasure ”

“ Well, that is very admirable, my lad, and I would be the last to blame you for it I mentioned it because I imagined you were in trouble of some kind Perhaps you feel that you work extremely hard for others and that no benefit will come of it ”

“ You are wrong there, sir I am as well rewarded as I could wish , nowhere else could I have earned the high wages you insist on paying me unasked You have given me a rise each year and last St John’s term my wages reached a hundred crowns which makes it very dear for you If you find it difficult to pay I will willingly accept less, I assure you ”

“COME, come François, we are at cross purposes,” replied Jean Vertaud, “and I don’t know how to take you. You are by no means a fool and I thought I had given you a broad enough hint; but since you are so modest I must help you out. Isn’t there any girl round here who takes your fancy?”

“No, sir,” answered François unhesitatingly.

“Really?”

“I give you my word.”

“If you had means isn’t there one you’d care for at all?”

“I don’t want to marry.”

“What a notion! You’re too young to know. But what’s your reason?”

“Reason!” echoed François. “Are you interested in it, sir?”

“Yes, since I feel affection for you.”

“I’ll tell it you, there’s no point in hiding it. I have never known father or mother . . . and, listen, here’s a thing I’ve never mentioned; I wasn’t forced to tell you, but had you asked me I wouldn’t have lied to you. I am a waif. I come from a foundling hospital.”

“Is that so?” exclaimed Jean Vertaud, rather taken aback by this confession. “I would never have thought it!”

“Why wouldn’t you have thought it? . . . Why,

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don't you reply, Master Vertaud ? Well, I'll answer the question for you It is because seeing me well-behaved you would have been astonished that a waif could be so Is it true, then, that waifs are suspected by everyone, and that there is something against them ? That is neither just nor humane , however, there it is, and one has to put up with it, for the best-natured people feel the same, and even you ”

“No, no,” said the miller, recovering himself, for he was an honourable man and was anxious to make up for a bad thought , “I don't want to be unjust, and if I was forgetful of that for a second you can forgive me, for it is already over You feel you can't marry, then, since you are a waif ? ”

“It is not that, sir, and I am not worried about such a drawback Women have all sorts of notions, and some are so good-hearted that that would be an additional reason ”

“Well, I declare, you are quite right,” said Jean Vertaud “Women are worth more than we are ! Besides,” he added laughing, “a handsome lad like you, glowing with youth, whole in mind and body, might well add zest to the exercise of benevolence ! But let's hear your reason ”

“Listen,” said François “A woman I never knew took me from the foundling hospital and nursed me When she died, another woman took charge of me for the sake of the small amount of money allowed by the government to me and my like , but she was kind to me, and when I had the misfortune to lose her I would have been inconsolable but for the care of a woman who was the kindest of the three, and for whom I have so great a love that I

want to live for no one but her. However, I've left her and shall perhaps never see her again, for she is well-off and may never have need of me. But very likely her husband, who, I am told, has been ill since the autumn, and who has run up debts no one knows of, may die soon and leave her with more creditors than property. If that happens, I tell you openly, sir, I shall go back to her. I will undertake no other task than that of helping her and her son, and by working for her ward off the burden of want. That is why I have no wish to bind myself in any other direction. I am working for you by the year, but when I marry I am bound for my whole life. Besides, it would be too heavy a load on my shoulders. When I had a wife and child how would I manage to support two households? And beyond that, even if the impossible happened and I found a wife with a little property, would I have the right to take from my own house and give to another? Therefore I prefer to remain unmarried. I am young, and so far my time has not come, still, even if some love affair came my way I would do my best to dismiss it, for, mark you, there is only one woman for me and that is my mother Madeleine, she who never despised me for being a waif, and who brought me up as if I were her own son."

"Well, my friend, what you have just told me increases my respect for you," replied Jean Vertaud. "There is nothing so hideous as ingratitude, nothing so charming as acknowledgment of benefits received. There are good reasons I could give you to show you could marry a young woman with the same ideas as yourself and who would help you to assist the old lady,

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but I'll have to consult someone about those reasons first '.

No particular cleverness is needed to see that out of goodness of heart and shrewdness of judgment Jean Vertaud had planned a marriage between his daughter and François. She was not at all bad-looking, and if she was a little older she had money enough to equalise the difference. She was an only girl and a good match, but up to the present she had not wanted to marry, to her father's disappointment. When he noticed that she seemed to make much of François he had questioned her on the subject, as she was a very reserved young woman he had been unable to draw her out, but at last, without giving a positive reply, she had consented to allow her father to sound François on the subject of marriage, and she was awaiting results with more anxiety than she would have had him know.

Jean Vertaud would have liked to be able to give her a more definite answer, firstly because he wanted to see her settled in life, and secondly because he could not hope for a better son-in-law than François. In addition to his affection for the lad he saw that, despite his poverty on arrival, he was worth a good deal in a family for his intelligence, quick work, and good behaviour.

The fact that François was a waif upset the miller's daughter, for she was rather proud, but she soon decided in his favour, and her eagerness increased on hearing that François was backward in loving. Women go by contraries, and if François had plotted to overcome the drawback of his birth he could not have done it in a better way than by showing a dis-

taste for marriage. Thus from that day Jean Vertaud's daughter set her heart more earnestly on winning François.

"Is that all it is?" she said to her father. "He thinks we would have neither the will nor the means to assist an old woman and to find a situation for her boy? He couldn't have understood your hints, father, for had he known it was a matter of entering our family he would not have worried on that account."

And that evening, between supper and bedtime, Jeannette Vertaud said to François. "I had a very high opinion of you, François, but you have gone up still more in my estimation since my father told me of your affection for the woman who brought you up and for whom you want to work all your life. It is your duty to feel so on this matter. . . . I would love to know the woman for whom you have retained so great an attachment so that I could help her if need be, she must be a nice woman."

"Oh yes," said François, only too pleased to talk about Madeleine, "she is a thoughtful woman with the same ideas as yourselves."

These words rejoiced Jean Vertaud's daughter, and, sure of herself, she added.

"I hope that if she met with misfortune as you fear she may, she would come to stay with us. I would help you to look after her, for I suppose she is no longer young? Is she not an invalid?"

"An invalid? No," said François, "she is not old enough to be infirm."

"Is she still young then?" asked Jeannette Vertaud, beginning to prick up her ears.

"Oh no, not at all," replied François simply. "I

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don't remember how old she would be by now. She was like a mother to me, and I never troubled about her age."

"Was she a fine woman?" demanded Jeannette after a moment's hesitation.

"Fine?" said François a little surprised. "Do you mean is she a pretty woman? For me she is pretty enough as she is, but, as a matter of fact, I have never thought about it. What difference could it make to my affection? She might be uglier than the devil and I should never have noticed it."

"Yes, but you can say round about how old she is?"

"Wait a minute! her son is five years younger than I am. Well, she's not old but she's not very young either. She's about like."

"Like me?" said Jeannette, forcing a laugh. "In that case if she became a widow she would be too old to marry again, wouldn't she?"

"It depends," replied François. "If her husband doesn't waste everything but leaves her a little property she won't lack suitors. There are fellows who, for money's sake, would as soon marry their grand aunts as their grand nieces."

"And you don't admire people who marry for money?"

"I wouldn't care about it," replied François.

The waif, though simple hearted, was not so simple-minded that he had not in the end understood her insinuations. His last remark was made with intention. But Jeannette ignored it and fell more deeply in love with him. She had been much courted without caring for any of her suitors. The first who



attracted her was he who turned his back on her so reasonable are women !

François noticed in the next few days that she was troubled, that she ate practically nothing, and that when he appeared to be looking the other way she fixed her eyes on him. Her caprice worried him. He respected this good young woman and he saw clearly that indifference on his part made her the more in love. But he did not care for her, and had he taken her it would have been calculatingly and out of duty rather than for real love.

He saw that he had better leave Jean Ver<sup>+</sup>taud's employ for, sooner or later, this business would lead to trouble or annoyance. But just at this time something happened which altered all his plans.

ONE morning the cure of Aigurande came as if for a walk to Jean Vertaud's mill. He patrolled up and down for a while until he could buttonhole François in a corner of the garden. He assumed a very confidential manner and asked him if he was really François called Strawberry, a name which he had been given (because of a birthmark on his left arm) by the officials to whom he had been delivered as a waif. The cure also asked his age as nearly as possible, the name of the women who had nursed him, where he had lived, in short, all he could tell him of his birth and his life.

François went to consult his papers and the cure seemed quite satisfied.

"Well," he said to him, "come to the parsonage to-morrow, or this evening, and don't tell anyone what I shall have to let you know, for I am forbidden to spread the story, and it is a matter of conscience."

When François arrived at the parsonage, the cure shut the doors, and drew from his cupboard four bits of thin paper, saying, "François Strawberry, there are four thousand francs sent by your mother. I am forbidden to tell you her name, or in what part of the country she lives, or if she is alive or dead now. A religious thought has caused her to remember you, and it appears she has always intended to do so, for she knew how to find you though living far away."

She knows you are a good lad, and she sends you the means of setting up for yourself on condition that you don't speak of this gift for six months unless it be to the woman you wish to marry. She asked me to consult you about its use or deposit, and also she asked me to let you use my name so as to keep the thing secret. I will do what you like about it , but I am instructed only to allow you the money on your word not to say anything or do anything which might disclose the secret. I know I can rely on your word ; will you give it me ? ”

François agreed and left the money in the curé's hands, asking him to deal with it as he thought fit , for he knew the priest to be a good man and they, like women-folk, are all virtue or all vice.

The waif returned to the house more sad than joyful. He thought of his mother ; he would have given the four thousand francs to see her and kiss her. But he told himself that very likely she had just died, and the money came to him under her will ; this made him still sadder to be deprived of wearing mourning and saying masses for her. He prayed God to pardon her, alive or dead, for abandoning her child, as her child pardoned her, and he asked forgiveness also for his own sins.

He tried not to show signs of worry, but for a couple of weeks he was absorbed in reveries at meal times to the astonishment of the Vertauds.

“The lad isn't being open with us,” observed the miller. “He must be in love.”

“Perhaps with me,” thought his daughter, “and he refrains from confessing it out of delicacy. He fears people will say he cares more for my wealth

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than for me And he behaves like this to hide his grief ”

Thereupon she decided to cajole his shyness, and encouraged him so charmingly with looks and words that he was a little roused from his depression

At times he said to himself that since he was rich enough to aid Madeleine if need be, he could very well marry a girl who would not want his money He was not in love with anyone , but he was aware of Jeannette Vertaud's good qualities and he was afraid of seeming unkind in taking no notice of her advances Sometimes his pity overcame him so that he half thought of consoling her But suddenly, during a journey to Crevant on his master's business, he met a roadman who lived near Presles and who told him of Cadet Blanchet's death, adding that he had left his affairs in a muddle and it was not known if his widow would be well or badly off

François had no reason for liking or regretting Miller Blanchet Yet he was so tender-hearted that tears stung his eyes and he felt like weeping when he heard this news , he thought that Madeleine would be lamenting her husband at that time, pardoning all and remembering nothing save that he was the father of her child And Madeleine's grief found an answer in his own heart and caused him to weep too for the sorrow she must be enduring He longed to jump on his horse and go to her , but he felt it his duty to ask his master's permission first

“SIR,” said he to Jean Vertaud, “I have to go away for a time I don’t know if it will be long or short. I have some business to do near my old place, and I wonder if you will let me go in a friendly spirit, though, to speak plainly, if you are unwilling to grant permission I can’t oblige you, for go I must in any case. Pardon me for being so outspoken. I should be sorry to cause you annoyance, and so I ask you as the only thanks for any service I have been able to render not to take it amiss that I leave you now. It is probable that I shall be back in a week if they don’t need me where I am going. But it is equally likely that I shan’t come back until late in the year or not at all for I don’t want to mislead you. However, I would return at any time if it lay in my power to lend you a hand with anything you couldn’t manage without my help. And before I leave I want to find a good worker to replace me and to whom if it is necessary in order to persuade him to come to you—I will give up the wages due to me at last St. John’s term. In that way we can arrange things without much bother for you, and you might shake hands with me to cheer me up a little on leaving you and to bring me luck.”

Jean Vertaud knew that the waif was not often set on having his own way, but that when he was, neither God nor the devil could turn him from his purpose.

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‘ You can be quite happy about it, my boy,” said he, shaking hands, “ it would be a lie to say it makes no difference to me. But rather than have a tiff with you I’d agree to anything ”

François spent the next day in seeking a successor for the mill, and he found a good reliable man just out of the army and pleased to find well paid work under a kind master—for Jean Vertaud had that reputation and had never wronged a soul

Before leaving, as he intended to do at dawn the following day, François wanted to say good-bye to Jeannette Vertaud at supper time. She was sitting on the step of the barn, saying she had a headache and wanted nothing to eat. He realised that she had been weeping and this disturbed him. He did not know how to begin to thank her for her goodness and to tell her he must go in spite of it. He sat down on an alder stump near her seat and strove to speak, but was unable to utter a single word. Thereupon she, knowing him to be there without looking up, put her handkerchief to her eyes. He raised his hand to take hers comfortingly but it occurred to him that he could not truthfully tell her what she wanted to hear. And when poor Jeannette saw that he did not move she felt ashamed of her grief, and, rising quietly and without any show of temper, she went into the barn to weep her fill. She lingered there a while thinking he would perhaps follow her and say something nice, but he went in to supper without allowing himself to go to her and ate his meal sadly and in silence.

It would be untrue to say that he did not feel for her on seeing her tears. His heart was touched and

he felt he could have been quite happy with such a nice woman so fond of him and whom he found it pleasant to caress. But he dismissed these ideas, thinking that Madeleine might need a friend, a counsellor, and a helper. And she had suffered and worked and been abused for his sake when he was a miserable homeless child sick with fevers.

"Now then," said he to himself next morning as he got up before daybreak, "no love affairs or fortune or peace for you! You are willing to forget you are a waif and to put aside the past like dozens of others who enjoy the present without looking back, but Madeleine Blanchet is in your heart and she says }  
"Take care you don't forget what I did for you" }  
Let me be off then, and may God help you, Jeannette, to find a nicer lover than your servant."

As he was thinking this he passed his good mistress's window, and had it been possible he would have left a flower or a leaf by the pane as a token of farewell, but it was the day after Twelfth Night; the earth was snow covered, there were no leaves on the trees, and not even a violet in the grass. So he knotted the favour he had won as king of Twelfth night at the celebrations the evening before in the corner of a white handkerchief and tied it to Jeannette's window-bar to show her he would have chosen her as his queen had she been present at supper.

"It isn't anything much," he said to himself, "but it is a token of goodwill and friendship which will absolve me from saying good-bye."

But he seemed to hear a voice within him dissuading him from leaving his gift and saying that a man has no right to behave like these young women who want

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to be loved, thought upon, and regretted, when they themselves have no corresponding feelings

"No, no, François," said he, putting his favour back into his pocket and hastening his steps "one must remain fixed on one's purpose and make others forget when one has resolved to forget them"

And thereupon he set off at a great rate, and before he had gone a couple of gunshots' distance from Jean Vertaud's mill he fancied he saw Madeleine and imagined he heard a feeble cry for help He seemed to see the apple tree, the fountain, Blanchet's meadow, the dam, the little bridge, and Jeannie rushing to meet him, the thought of Jeannette Vertaud was not strong enough to hold him back from all this He went so fast that he did not feel the cold, he did not think of food or drink, nor did he pause until he had left the main road and reached by way of the short cut to Presles the wooden cross of Plessys

There he knelt and fervently kissed the wood as a good Christian who recovers a friend After that he went on down the hill, the way here is as wide as a field, it is the finest pasture in the world, high up, open to the four winds and the sky, and so steep in descent that when it is frozen over even an ox-waggon would slide rapidly down and might fall headlong into the river which runs unseen below it

François mistrusted it and took off his sabots more than once, he reached the footbridge without mishap Leaving Montipouret on his left, he gave a gay good day to the solid old belfry beloved of everybody, for it is the first sight the wanderer has of home and is a guide to those who have lost their way



I don't mind the roads at all, they are so smiling, green, and pleasant to see in the warm sun. There are shady roads where the sun does not beat fiercely on one's head. But they are the most treacherous, for you might easily follow them to Rome imagining you are on the way to Angibault. Luckily the old belfry of Montipouret rears itself gallantly, and its gleaming point strikes through the rifts to show you whether your face is set to eastward or to westward.

But the waif had no need of such beacons to guide him. He knew every twist and turn of the road, all the byways and highways, all the tracks and paths, the very hedges, so that he could have taken the shortest way, as a crow flies, even at the dead of night.

About midday he perceived the roof of the mill at Cormouet through the leafless trees, and he was glad to see by the thread of blue smoke uprising from its chimneys that the dwelling had not been abandoned to the rats.

He cut across Blanchet's meadow and thus missed passing the fountain, but he saw through the bare boughs and bushes the sun glinting on the water which never freezes for it comes from the spring. The approach to the mill was frozen, however, and so slippery that even a nimble person might have tripped on the stones and the river banks. He saw the old mill-wheel, black with age and damp, with long icicles as sharp as needles hanging from its sails. But many trees were missing from around the mill and the place wore a changed look. Blanchet's debts had set the axe to work after his death, and in many places the fresh-cut alder stumps showed red as martyrs' blood. The house had a derelict air, the

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roof needed repair, and the furnace was partly corroded by the frost

Then, sadder still, there was no sound about the place, no human being, no animal, nothing, save that a dog with a grey coat with black and white patches—one of the miserable country mongrels—came out of the doorway and shambled, yelping, to meet the waif, he ceased barking at once, however, and lay down at François' feet

"Well, well, Labriche, so you know me?" François said to him "I wouldn't have recognised you, so old, so skinny, that your ribs stick out, and with white whiskers!"

François rambled on thus as he looked at the dog, for he was quite overcome and seemed to want to gain time before entering the house Up till then he had been in a vast hurry, but now he was afraid, imagining he might never see Madeleine again, that she had gone away, or that she, and not the miller, had died, or that he had been misled by false news of his death, in short, François experienced all the emotions of one within reach of his heart's desire

AT last he lifted the latch of the door and there stood before him not Madeleine, but a pretty well-built young woman, as rosy as a dawn in Spring and as lively as a cricket

“What do you want, young man?” she asked pleasantly.

Charming as was her appearance François did not keep his eyes on her long but looked round the room for the miller’s widow. All he saw was that her bed-curtains were drawn; she was doubtless in bed. He never thought of replying to the pretty girl who was the younger sister of the dead miller and whose name was Mariette Blanchet. He went straight to the yellow bed and, without argument or question, cautiously drew back the curtain, there he saw Madeleine Blanchet stretched out, pale, unconscious, and wasted with fever. He watched and examined her for a long time without moving or speaking: and despite his grief at finding her ill, despite his fear that she might die, he was overjoyed to see her face again and to say to himself:

“I am looking on Madeleine.”

But Mariette Blanchet pushed him gently away from the bed, drew the curtain, and beckoned to him to go over to the hearth with her

“And now, young sir,” she said, “who are you, and what do you want? I don’t know you, and

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you are not of these parts What can I do for you ? ”

But François did not hear her, and instead of replying asked her how long Madame Blanchet had been ill, if her life was in danger, and if she was being properly nursed

To which Mariette replied that she had been ill since her husband's death, because of the strain of nursing and tending him day and night, that the doctor had not been sent for but that if she grew worse someone would go for him, and as for being nursed properly she, Mariette, did not spare herself as was her duty

At these words the waif looked at her attentively and there was no need for him to ask her name, for, besides knowing that about the time he himself left them Blanchet had taken his sister into his house, he recognised in the pretty face of that sweet young girl a marked resemblance to the unpleasant face of the dead miller There are many attractive faces which resemble ugly ones though it is difficult to say how that may be And though Mariette Blanchet was as sweet a sight as her brother had been displeasing there was an unmistakable family likeness However, where the miller's expression had been morose and sullen Mariette looked more of a tease than irritable and more fearless than fearsome

Now François did not feel entirely comfortable about her ability to assist Madeleine though he was not very troubled about it either

Her cap was white, well laundered and well set, her hair, done rather in the fashion of a townswoman, was shining, cared for, and neatly dressed, her hands

were white and her apron also for a sick nurse. In short, she was extremely young, smart, and irresponsible to be thinking day and night of a person too far gone to help herself at all.

This reflection decided François to seat himself in the chimney-corner without further question and not to leave the place until he saw if his dear Madeleine was on the road to recovery or if her illness was fatal.

Mariette was much astonished to see him unceremoniously take possession of the fire and make himself at home. He bent over the embers and appeared so unwilling to chat that she did not dare seek again to know who he was or what he wanted.

But a moment later in came Catherine, for eighteen or twenty years servant in the house, and without noticing him she went to her mistress's bed, glanced warily at her, and then crossed to the fireplace to see how Mariette was getting on with the invalid's drink she was preparing. Her whole bearing manifested great solicitude for Madeleine, and François, feeling her sincerity, in a *jerk*, longed to say a friendly good-day, but . . .

“But,” said the curé's servant, interrupting the hemp-dresser “you used an unreasonable word. ‘Jerk’ doesn't mean a moment or a minute either.”

“Well, I tell you,” replied the hemp-dresser, “a moment doesn't mean anything and an idea passes through one's brain in less than a minute. I don't know how many things you can think of in a minute. Now, to see and understand a thing happening takes only the time of a ‘jerk’ I'll call it a ‘tiny jerk’ if you like.”

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“ But a ‘ jerk ’ of time ! ” objected the old purist

“ Ah ! a ‘ jerk ’ of time ! That upsets you, Mother Monique ? Doesn’t everything work by ‘ jerks ’ like that The sun rising in flaming leaps, and your eyes blinking as you look at it, the blood throbbing in the veins, the church clock dropping the time crumb by crumb as the sifter drops the wheaten grain, your rosary as you tell it, your heart when the cure is late home, the rain falling drop by drop, and even, we are told, the earth turning like a mill-wheel ? You don’t feel it going—nor do I, the machine is too well oiled, but the ‘ jerks ’ must go on for we revolve round so far in twenty-four hours And we also use ‘ round ’ to indicate a certain time Then I can say ‘ jerk ’—and I won’t retract it And don’t interrupt me if you want me to go on ”

“ No, no—your machine is also too well oiled,” replied the old woman “ Give your tongue another of your ‘ jerks ’ then ”

I WAS saying that François was tempted to greet old Catherine and make himself known to her; but as, in the same 'jerk' of time, he felt like weeping, he was ashamed of looking a fool, and did not even raise his head. But as she bent over the fireplace Catherine saw his long legs and drew back in alarm.

"Whoever is that?" she whispered to Mariette in a corner of the room. "Where has this chap come from?"

"Don't ask me," replied the girl, "how should I know! I've never seen him before. He came in unceremoniously as if to an inn without saying a word of greeting. He asked about my sister-in-law as if he were a relative or one of the heirs; and there he is sitting by the fire as you see. Speak to him yourself, I don't want to. Perhaps he is not quite all there."

"What! you think he is out of his mind? All the same he doesn't look wicked as far as I can see for he seems to be trying to hide his face."

"Suppose he is up to no good?"

"Don't be afraid, Mariette, I'm here to stop him. If he interferes with us I will throw a pan of boiling water over his legs and the fire-irons at his head."

While they were chattering thus François was thinking of Madeleine.

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"Poor thing," he was thinking, "she, who has never had anything but misery and bad treatment from her husband, is lying ill there because she took care of him and nursed him until the hour of his death. And here is this young girl, his sister—and spoiled by him from all accounts—she doesn't show much anxiety in her features. If she is tired and has been crying she doesn't show it, her eyes are as clear and bright as the sun."

He could not help watching her from beneath his hat, for he had never seen so fresh and sprightly a beauty. But though her appearance fascinated him it went no deeper.

"Come along now," Catherine continued whispering to her young mistress, "I'm going to speak to him. We must find out what he intends to do."

"Speak nicely," said Mariette, "we don't want to upset him, we are alone in the house. Jeannie is probably a good way away and would not hear us call out."

"Jeannie!" echoed François, who had caught the name of his old friend amongst all this whispering. "Where is Jeannie that I can't see him? Is he tall, is he handsome, and strong?"

"Dear me!" thought Catherine, "he asks that because he has bad intentions very likely. Now, who in heaven's name can he be? I don't know him by his figure or by his voice, I'll know the rights of it and have a look at his face."

She would not have shrunk from confronting the devil himself, for she was as stoutly built as a ploughman and as bold as a soldier, so she stepped up to him determined to make him take off his hat, or to knock



it off to see if he was a ruffian or a decent fellow. She went for the waif, never dreaming that it could be François. His mood was such that he never noticed her, and she on her part had forgotten him long since; besides, he had so much improved that she would have had to look more than once to recognise him. But as she went up to give him a poke and possibly to insult him, Madeleine roused and called to Catherine so feebly that her voice was almost inaudible, saying she was burning with thirst.

François jumped up and would have been first at her side but he feared to give her a shock. He contented himself with giving Catherine the drink as quickly as possible, and she, taking it, hurried to her mistress, forgetting for the moment to bother about anything but her condition. Mariette also took her share by lifting Madeleine in her arms to give her a drink, and it was not hard, for Madeleine had become pitifully thin and wasted.

“How do you feel, my dear sister?” asked Mariette.

“Quite well, quite well, my child,” replied Madeleine in the voice of a dying person, she never complained, so as to prevent others from worrying.

“But,” she said, looking at the waif, “that isn’t Jeannie over there? Who is it, my child, if I am not dreaming, that tall man by the fireplace?”

And Catherine answered.

“We don’t know, ma’am; he doesn’t speak, he stands there like a half-wit.”

The waif made a slight movement as he looked at Madeleine, afraid to go to her too soon and yet dying to speak. Catherine saw his face then, but she did not know him after three years, and, thinking Madeleine

## THE COUNTRY WAIF

afraid, replied, "Don't you worry, ma'am, I was about to get rid of him as you called me"

"Don't send him away," Madeleine said in a slightly stronger voice, and drawing her curtain further back, "I know him, and he has done well to come to see me Come here, come here, my son, every day I have prayed to God to let me give you my blessing"

And the waif ran and flung himself on his knees by her bed, sobbing for grief and joy until he nearly choked Madeleine held his hands and then his head, and kissed him saying

"Call Jeannie Catherine, call Jeannie so that he may rejoice too Oh! I thank God, François, and now I can die if it is His will, for both my children are grown up and I can bid them farewell"

CATHERINE hurried out to fetch Jeannie, followed by Mariette eager to find out what all this might mean

François was left alone with Madeleine who kissed him again and began to cry : presently she closed her eyes and fell into an even worse state than before. François did not know how to revive her from her swoon . he was quite demented, and could only hold her in his arms calling her his dear mother, his dear friend, and beseeching her, as if it lay in her power, not to leave this life so quickly and without hearing what he had to tell her.

So, with anxious words, tender care, and gentle caresses he brought her back to consciousness. She began to recognise him and to listen to him . And he told her how he had guessed her need of him and had left everything to get to her , he said he would not leave her again as long as she asked him to stay, and that if she wanted him for her servant he asked nothing more than the pleasure of waiting on her and the delight of spending his days obedient to her will . And he added .

“ Don’t answer, don’t speak, my dear mother, you are too weak, don’t say anything. Only look at me if you are glad to see me and I will know that you want my friendship and my service ”

Madeleine looked at him contentedly and listened,

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comforted, and they were happy together in spite of the sorrow of her illness

Jeannie, summoned by Catherine's lusty shouts, came in to share their joy. He had grown into a handsome boy between fourteen and fifteen years of age, not very strong, but pleasingly alert, and so well brought up that he always spoke nicely and in a friendly way

"Oh, I'm glad to see you like this, Jeannie," François said to him. "You're not very tall or stout, but I'm glad of that, for I fancy you'll still need my help to climb trees or ford the river. You are still a little delicate without being ill, aren't you? Oh well, you can be my child a bit longer if you like, yes, yes, you still need me, and you will make me obey your whims as in the old days."

"Yes, my four hundred whims, as you used to say," said Jeannie.

"My word, yes! What a memory he has! Ah! it is dear of you, Jeannie, not to have forgotten your François. And have we still our four hundred whims a day?"

"Oh, no," said Madeleine, "he is very sensible now, he has only about two hundred."

"Neither more nor less?"

"Oh! I don't mind," replied Jeannie, "since my darling mother is beginning to laugh again, I'll agree with whatever anyone likes. And I must say that just now I have the whim more than five hundred times a day of wanting to see her cured."

"Well said, Jeannie," said François. "See how well the child has learnt to talk! Listen, my boy, God will satisfy your five hundred whims on that

score We are going to look after your darling mother and cheer her up, and little by little make her laugh so that her sickness will go away."

Catherine was on the doorstep, anxious to come in to see and talk to François, but Mariette held her arm and never stopped questioning her

"What!" she said, "a waif! He looks very decent, anyway"

And she peered through the crack in the door which she held ajar.

"But how is it he is so friendly with Madeleine?"

"Didn't I tell you she brought him up, and he was a very good fellow too."

"Yes, but she never mentioned him to me, nor did you either"

"Oh Lord, I never thought about it, he had gone away and I had almost forgotten him, besides I knew that our mistress had been in trouble on his account and I didn't want to rake up the past"

"In trouble? How in trouble?"

"Lord! because she was so fond of him, she could not help it, he was so good-natured, that child, and your brother wouldn't have him in the house; your brother isn't always very nice as you know!"

"We mustn't say that now he is dead, Catherine."

"Yes, yes, you're right. I had forgotten, I declare; my memory's so bad. And yet it is only a fortnight ago But let me go in, miss, I want to give the boy a meal I expect he is hungry." And she pulled her arm away and went up to kiss François, he was such a handsome lad that she quite forgot her bygone remark that she would sooner kiss her sabot than a waif

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"Well, my dear François," she said to him, "how glad I am to see you! I thought you were never coming back. But just look, madame, how he has grown up! I am surprised you knew him at once. If you hadn't said who it was it would have taken me some time to recognise him. Isn't he handsome? isn't he? And he's beginning to have a beard! It doesn't show much, but you can feel it. Lord! when you left, François, that couldn't be felt—now it does just prick one. And what a strong thing he is, my dear! What arms, what hands, and such legs too! A workman like that is worth three ordinary men. How much do they pay you over there?"

Madeleine laughed softly to see how pleased Catherine was with François, and she watched him, equally glad to have him back in his glowing youth and health. She would have liked to see Jeannie grow up into such a fine young man. As for Mariette she was shocked to see Catherine so boldly admiring a youth, and she had grown scarlet—though quite innocently. But the more she tried to refrain from looking at François the more her eyes strayed towards him and she perceived him to be, as Catherine had said, wonder fully good-looking and as sturdy as an oak sapling.

And then, without stopping to think, she began to wait on him nicely, to pour out the best wine of the year's vintage and to rouse him when, watching Madeleine and Jeannie, he forgot to eat.

"Come, eat more than that," she said to him, "you have hardly touched a thing. You ought to have more appetite since you have come such a long way!"

"Don't take any notice of me, young lady,"

François replied at length, "I am too glad to be here to want to eat or drink much."

"Now, come along," said he to Catherine when the table had been cleared, "show me the mill and the house, it seems to me to be rather neglected, and I want to talk to you about it."

And when he had led her outside he questioned her on the state of affairs in an eager fashion and as if he were determined to know everything.

"Ah! François," said Catherine, bursting into tears, "things are as bad as they can be, and if no one comes to the help of my poor mistress, I believe that wicked woman will turn her out and make her spend everything she has in a lawsuit."

"Don't cry, it worries me to hear you," said François; "just try to explain things. What wicked woman do you mean? Madame Sévère?"

"Why, yes! By heaven! She is not content with having ruined our dead master. She lays claim to all he left. She has about fifty ways of getting what she wants. She says Cadet Blanchet owed her money and that when she has sold all we have left she will not have been paid. She sends the bailiffs every day and already expenses are very heavy. Our mistress, to pacify her, has paid all she can and the worry of that after the fatigue of nursing her husband will kill her, I am afraid. Soon we will be without food or fire the way we are going on. The mill-boy has left us because we owed him two years' pay. The mill isn't working, and if that continues we shall lose our customers. They have taken the horses and the harvest; they will be sold, too; all the trees are going to be cut down. Ah! François, it is dreadful."

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And she began to cry afresh

"And what about you, Catherine?" François asked her "Are you owed money, too? Have your wages been paid?"

"Owed! I!" bellowed Catherine, changing her doleful tone to the roar of a bull "Never, never! Whether my wages are paid or not is nobody's business"

"Well done, Catherine, well said!" François said to her "Go on looking after your mistress, and don't worry about anything else I earned a bit of money in my last place, and I have enough with me to save the horses, the harvest, and the trees As for the mill, I'll go and have a look at it, and if there is anything wrong I'll soon set it right Jeannie, who is as swift as a hare, must be on the run from this moment until the evening and to morrow from day-break to tell all the customers that the mill is working like ten thousand devils and that the miller is waiting for the flour"

"And what about a doctor for our mistress?"

"I've been thinking about that, but I would rather watch her until to night to make a decision You see, Catherine, this is my opinion—doctors are all right when the sick person cannot do without them, but if it is not much of an illness one gets well sooner with God's help than with their drugs Besides, the doctor's face cures the rich, but it often kills the poor He pleases and amuses those in easy circumstances, but scares those who only see that face when they are in danger, and that makes them worse I fancy Madame Blanchet will soon get well when she sees her business set going again



“And one more thing before we end this conversation, Catherine, I want to know the truth and you must not mind telling me. It will never come out, and if you remember what I am like you ought to know that a secret is safe with the waif, and I have not changed at all.”

“Yes, yes, I know it,” said Catherine; “but why do you consider yourself a waif? No one calls you that nowadays, François, for you do not deserve to be called it.”

“Never mind that I shall always be what I am, and I am not in the habit of bothering my mind about such things. Tell me what you think of your young mistress, Mariette Blanchet.”

“Oh, well. She is a pretty girl. Are you already thinking of marrying her? She has some property, her brother could not get at her money for she is a minor, and unless you have come into a fortune, Mr. François . . .”

“Waifs do not come into fortunes,” said François, “and as for who is to marry whom, I have no time for thinking about marriage. What I want to get out of you is if the girl is any better than her dead brother, and if Madeleine is pleased with her, or if it is a worry to have her in the house.”

“That,” said Catherine, “God may be able to tell you, but I can’t. Up to the present, she is kindly and thoughtless enough. She likes clothes, lace caps, and dancing. She is not particularly selfish and Madeleine spoils her and treats her so well that she has had no chance to show her teeth. She has never known suffering and we cannot say what will happen to her.”

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"Was she very fond of her brother?"

"Not very, except perhaps when he took her to parties, and when our mistress tried to tell him that it was not right to take a decent girl into the company of Madame Severe, the child, thinking only of her pleasure, caressed her brother and made faces at Madeleine who had to give in. And for that reason Mariette is not as great an enemy of Madame Severe as I could wish. But you couldn't call her anything but amiable and pleasant to her sister-in-law."

"That will do, Catherine, I don't want to ask you anything else. I forbid you though to say anything of our conversation together to that young girl."

François fulfilled his promises to Catherine. Before the evening Jeannie's diligence had provided corn for milling, and the mill was in working order, the ice round the mill-wheel was smashed and melted, the machine greased, the broken bits of wood replaced by new ones. François worked until two in the morning and at four he was up again. He tip toed into Madeleine's room, and found Catherine watching there. He asked her about the sick woman. She had slept well, consoled by the coming of her dear servant and by the help he had brought. And as Catherine refused to leave her mistress before Mariette came to her, François asked at what time the beauty of Cormouet got up.

"Not before daybreak," said Catherine.

"Then you have still two hours to wait, and you will get no sleep at all."

"In the daytime I sleep a little in my chair, or in the barn on the straw while the cows are feeding."

"Well, you are to go to bed now," said François,

“and I will wait here for the young lady, to show her that there are some who go to bed later than she does and who rise earlier. I will busy myself with looking into the papers of the dead man and those which the bailiffs have brought since his death. Where are they ? ”

“There, in Madeleine’s chest,” said Catherine. “I will light the lamp for you, François. Come, be brave and try to get us out of this mess since you know all about such writing.”

And she went off to bed as obedient to the waif as if he were the master of the house for it is true that he who is intelligent and good-natured can command people anywhere, and it is his right to do so.

**B**LFORE setting to work, François, as soon as he was alone with Madeleine and Jeannie, who always slept in the same room as his mother, went to see how the sick woman was sleeping, and he saw she was looking much better than on his arrival. He felt very glad to think that she would not need a doctor and that he alone, by the comfort he brought her, would be able to save her health and amend her lot.

He began to examine the papers and soon realised the intentions of Madame Severe and saw what was left of Madeleine's property to satisfy her. Besides what Madame Severe had used up and made Cadet Blanchet squander on her, she claimed a debt of two hundred crowns, and Madeleine had hardly more than that of her own property united with that left to Jeannie by Blanchet—a heritage which had been reduced to the mill and its outbuildings, including the yard, the meadow, the sheds, the garden, the hemp field and the plantation, for the fields and all the other land had melted like snow in the hands of Cadet Blanchet.

"Thank God!" thought François, "I have four hundred crowns with the cure of Aigurande, and if I cannot do better, Madeleine will at least be able to keep her home, the produce of the mill, and what remains of her dowry. But I think I can do better than that. First of all, let me find out if these

bills signed by Blanchet for Madame Sévère were not extorted by ruse and begging ; then I can do a business stroke over the lands that have been sold. I know quite well how to manage these things, and according to the names of the present owners, I bet anything I know where I must go to find out where the money is."

The truth is that Blanchet two or three years before his end, embarrassed by his debts to Madame Sévère and pressed for money, had sold his property at a very low price to whoever came along. He had transferred his credit to Madame Sévère thinking thereby to rid himself of her and the friends who had helped her to ruin him. But, as so often happens in such a sale, nearly all those who were in a hurry to buy, attracted by the fertility of the ground, had not a farthing to pay with, and it was with great difficulty that they paid off their interest. Things could have gone on like that for ten or twenty years, it was money invested, but ill-invested, for Madame Sévère and her friends, and she grumbled a great deal at Cadet Blanchet's hastiness, for she was afraid of not being paid. At all events that is what she said ; but it was a speculation, like any other. A peasant, however miserably poor, will always pay interest, for he is unwilling to let go of what bit of ground he has and which the creditor may take back if he is dissatisfied.

We know all about it, my good folk ! More than once we have had a chance of enriching ourselves by buying good land at a low price. But, low as it may be, it is too high for us. Our covetous eyes are bigger than our purses and we worry ourselves trying to till a field of which the harvest covers barely half the inter-

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est exacted by the seller And when we have slaved and sweated half our miserable lives we find ourselves ruined, and only the earth has benefited by our toil and trouble The land is worth double, and it is the moment to sell it If it sold well we would be saved, but that never happens The interest we have been paying has sucked us dry so that we have to sell at once at any price If we kick against this the courts force us to do it and the first owner, if he is still alive, or his representative or inheritors, take back their property just as it is, that is to say that for long years their land has been in our hands and we have been paying them eight and ten per cent interest, then they get it back, worth double because of our labour—a good piece of land which costs them neither trouble nor money and the value of which has been increased by the passage of time Thus might will always overcome right, and we poor creatures will always be punished for our covetousness and will remain as stupid as ever

In this way Madame Severe held a mortgage on her own property and at a good rate of interest But she also had Cadet Blanchet's estate under her thumb, for she had planned so well that the inheritors of his land succeeded to the mortgage and the payment devolved on them

François, seeing through the trick, considered all means of getting back the land cheaply without ruining anyone, and doing Madame Severe and her friends a bad turn by upsetting their speculation

It was no easy task He had enough money to buy back practically all the land at the price for which it had been sold Neither Madame Severe nor

anybody else could refuse the refund ; it was in the interests of the buyers to resell as quickly as possible and forestall their future ruin For, let me tell you, listeners, young and old, land bought on credit means certain beggary in your old age. But it is not much good telling you this it will not lessen your mania for acquisition. No one sees a tilled field in the sun without being in a fever to own it. And that is what François dreaded so much that burning fever of the peasant who will not be torn from his glebe-land. Do you know what glebe is, my children ? Once upon a time it was much talked of in our parishes. The story went that in the old days the lords bound us to it to sweat us to death, but that the Revolution cut the rope and that we no longer strain like oxen at the master's plough. The truth is that we have merely tied ourselves to our own harrow instead, that we sweat no less, and that we die of it just the same

The well-to-do townsfolk hereabouts claim that the remedy is never to need or to covet anything. Last Sunday I gave a very good answer to someone who was preaching to me about that I said if we could be sensible enough, we poor peasants, not to eat, to work the whole time, never to sleep, and to drink the lovely clear water if the frogs don't mind, that is we should get on very well, and we would be complimented on our wisdom and good behaviour

Following the same train of thought, François the waif racked his brains to find a means of making the buyers resell He decided at last to whisper a lie in their ears to say that Madame Sévère appeared rich without really being so, that she had more debts than there are holes in a sieve, and that any day her

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creditors might take over her credit as well as all her property. He meant to tell them this in confidence, and when he had thoroughly scared them he would make Madeleine use his own money to get back the lands at the price which had been paid for them.

At the same time the lie weighed on his conscience until it occurred to him to give a small sum to each of the poor people who had bought the land to compensate them for the interest they had paid. In this way Madeleine would get back her own rights and yet the buyers would be saved from ruin and loss.

He did not trouble about the discredit his story might bring upon Madame Severe. He argued that a hen is quite right to pull out the feathers of a bird which has destroyed her chickens.

At that moment Jeannie awoke and got up quietly so as not to disturb his mother, then, after saying good-morning to François, he hurried off to announce to the rest of the customers that the mill was repaired and that there was a new miller working there.



**I**T was already fully day when Mariette Blanchet rose from her bed, and dressed charmingly in her mourning such neat black and such clean white that she might have been a little magpie. The poor child was in great trouble because her mourning prevented her, for a time, from going to dances and all the young men would be miserable without her ; she was so good-hearted that she felt extremely sorry for them.

“What ! ” she said, seeing François tidying papers in Madeleine’s room, “you are taking over the whole thing here, Mr. Miller ; you make flour, transact business, cook the gruel ; we shall soon see you sewing and spinning . . .”

“And you, young lady,” said François, observing that she was admiring him with her eyes as she chaffed him with her tongue, “I haven’t yet noticed you spinning or sewing ; I fancy you will soon sleep until midday ; that will be very good for you. It keeps the complexion fresh.”

“Hullo, Mr. François, so we are already uttering home truths. . . . Beware of that game ; I can play it too ”

“At your service, young lady.”

“All in good time ; don’t be afraid, my fine miller. But what has become of Catherine that you are acting sick-nurse ? Wouldn’t you like a skirt and a cap ? ”

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"No doubt you would want a miller's blouse and hat, then, to go to the mill? For, as you don't do the woman's job, which is to watch for a while by your sister's bed, you wish to turn the straw and work the mill. At your service. Let us exchange clothing."

"You appear to be trying to teach me a lesson?"

"No, you taught me one first, and that is why, out of honesty, I return that which you lent me."

"Good! good! You like to laugh and joke. But you choose the wrong moment. We are not merry here. Not long since we were at the cemetery. And if you chatter so much you will disturb my sister-in-law who is in sore need of repose."

"For that very reason you should not raise your voice, young lady, I am speaking very softly to you, and you are not just now talking in the proper tones for a sick-room."

"That will do, if you please," said Mariette, dropping her voice, but growing red all the same, "do me the kindness of seeing if Catherine is anywhere about, and tell me why she left my sister-in-law in your care."

"I beg your pardon, young lady," said François, without getting heated at all. "But since you are so fond of sleep it was impossible to leave her in your care, so she had to be confided to me. And as for summoning the poor woman—I won't, for she is overcome with fatigue. Without offence, I must remind you that she has been up for a fortnight. I sent her to bed, and I intend to do her work as well as my own until midday, for it is only fair that we should help one another."

"Listen, Mr François," said the girl with a sudden

change of tone, "you appear to want to tell me that I think only of myself and that I leave all the bother to others. Perhaps truly I ought to have sat up in my turn had Catherine said she was tired. But she said she wasn't at all, and I did not think my sister-in-law so dangerously ill. It seems you judge me to be unkind, but I don't know why. You have only known me since yesterday, and we have not been on sufficiently familiar terms to justify you taking me up in that way. You behave too much as if you were the head of the family whereas really . . ."

"Go on, say it, my lovely Mariette; say what is on the tip of your tongue. And really I was brought up by charity isn't that it? and I can't be a member of the family, for I have no family; I haven't the right, being a waif! Is that all you would like to say?"

As he gave Mariette this direct challenge François scrutinised her face in a way that made her blush to the roots of her hair, for she saw that he was speaking as a man who is angered and in earnest, although at the same time he appeared so quiet and mild that she felt he could not answer back or speak or think unjustly.

The poor girl felt a little afraid she who was so sharp with her tongue as a rule but her fear did not detract from her desire to appear pleasing in the eyes of this handsome youth who spoke so sternly and looked at her with such frankness. She felt so dumbfounded and embarrassed that she had hard work to restrain her tears and hastily turned away lest François should see her emotion.

But he had noticed it already, and said to her in a friendly voice. "You have not annoyed me a bit,

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Mariette, and you have no need to be annoyed either I don't think ill of you I only feel that you are young, that the house is in a bad way, and that it doesn't seem to trouble you, and I must tell you what I think "

" Well, what do you think ? " she exclaimed " let us have it all at one blow so that we know if you are a friend or an enemy "

" I think that if you don't care to take a little trouble and pains about one you love and who is in a bad state, you had better get out of the way, leave everything, think about your fine clothes, your lovers, your future marriage , but don't be surprised if other people get on with your job here But if you are kind-hearted, my dear child, if you love your sister-in-law and your good little nephew, and even the poor servant who is ready to die in harness like a faithful horse, you must get up a bit earlier in the morning, look after Madeleine, comfort Jeannie, relieve Catherine, and, above all, do not listen to Madame Severe who is the enemy of this house—a bad woman, believe me That is what I think, no more than that "

" I am very glad to hear it," said Mariette, a little drily, " and now perhaps you will tell me what right you have to urge me to think as you do "

" Oh ! is that the way you take it ? " François replied " My right is the waif's right, and—you ought to know this—the right of the child brought up here by the charitableness of Madame Blanchet that fact gives me the right to love her as my mother, and the right to act in such a way that she is rewarded for her kindness "

" I don't blame you for that," replied Mariette,

“and I see that I can’t do better than to offer you my esteem at the moment and my friendship later on.”

“I am glad of that,” said François. “Won’t you shake hands on it ? ”

And he went towards her with outstretched hand and no sign of embarrassment. But the silly child felt suddenly coquettish, and, taking her hand away, remarked that it was not nice for a young girl to give her hand to a boy.

François laughed at that and let her go, knowing that she could not behave simply, and that she thought first and foremost of seeking his admiration.

“Well, my girl,” he thought, “you won’t have any luck there, and neither will we be friends according to your lights.”

He went towards Madeleine who had just woken up, and who said to him, taking both his hands in hers :

“I have slept well, my son, and I am glad your face is the first I see on waking ; but why is my Jeannie not with you ? ”

Then when matters had been explained to her she spoke kindly to Mariette, fearing that the girl might have sat up all night with her, and assured her there was no need to take so much care of her in such a slight illness. Mariette expected François to say that she had really got up very late, but he said nothing, and left her alone with Madeleine who was anxious to try to dress as she no longer felt feverish.

She felt so well at the end of three days that she could talk business with François

“Don’t worry, my dear mother,” he said to her ;  
“I grew out of my stupidity a little over there, and

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I know how things should be done I want to get your affairs straight again, and I am going to see things through Let me do it, don't give the lie to anything I may say, and sign all the things I give you to sign Now that I am less troubled about your health I am going to the town to see the lawyers It is market day, and I shall meet the folk I want to see, and I reckon I shall not waste my time "

He did as he had promised, and when he had received advice from the lawyers he saw that the last bills signed by Blanchet for Madame Severe could be very useful in a lawsuit, since he had signed them in an unfit state, being fuddled with fever, wine, and stupidity Madame Severe imagined that Madeleine would not take it to court because of the cost François had no intention of urging Madeleine to do so, but he thought a suitable arrangement could be made by going about things in a friendly way at first, and since he had to have someone to visit the enemy he thought of a plan which succeeded admirably

He had noticed for the last three days that young Mariette was in the habit of going for a daily walk round by Dollins, where Madame Severe lived, and that she was on better terms than he would have wished with that woman, simply because she met there young people of her acquaintance and well-to-do folk who murmured flattery in her ear It was not that she really wanted to listen to them, she was still an innocent girl and thought no evil could befall her But she liked compliments as a cat likes cream She hid her walks from Madeleine, and as the latter never gossiped with other women, and was not yet out of her room, she did not notice any-

thing amiss and never suspected the girl Catherine was not the woman to guess or notice the least thing. The little wretch laid her plans so well that on the pretext of taking the flock to graze, she went off to enjoy herself in bad company, and left the sheep in the care of some little shepherd-boy.

François going about his work at the mill noticed this, said nothing about it at the house, and made use of it in the following manner.

HE went and planted himself in her path, at the ford, and as she crossed the bridge on the way to Dollins, she found the waif astride the middle of it with one leg overhanging the river at each side and on his face the expression of a man who has plenty of time at his disposal. She became as red as a poppy, and if she had had time to pretend to be there by chance she would have turned aside. But the bridge was hidden by branches, and so she did not see the enemy until she was in his clutches. He was facing her, and she saw no hope of going on or retreating without being seen.

"Hullo! Mister Miller," she cried, to see what boldness would do. "Won't you move aside a bit to let other folks go by?"

"No, young lady," replied François, "for I am the guardian of the bridge for this evening, and I collect toll of all who wish to pass."

"Are you crazy, François? You don't pay toll in this part of the country, and no one has the right of way over any bridge or whatever you call them in your Aigurande. But you may say what you please so long as you remove yourself as quickly as you can, this isn't the place for fooling, you will make me fall into the water."

"Then," François, without moving away, and folding his arms on his chest, "you think that I



want to fool with you and that my toll fee will be to say sweet nothings to you ? Get rid of that idea, young lady : I want to talk sensibly to you, and I will allow you to pass over if you will let me accompany you to the end of the road to talk to you."

"That will not suit me at all," said Mariette, a little fluttered at the thought of what François might be going to say to her. "What would they say of me if I were seen alone on the road with a boy to whom I am not even engaged ?"

"You are right," said François. "Since Madame Sévère is not here to guarantee your reputation you might be talked about ; that is why you are going to see her, so that you may walk about her garden with all your admirers Oh, well, so as not to embarrass you I will tell you here, in two words, what I have to say, for it is important and this is it : You are a good girl, you are fond of your sister-in-law, Madeleine ; you see that she is in trouble, and you would like to help her, is that not so ?"

"If that is what you want to talk to me about I will listen to you, for it is quite true," replied Mariette.

"Well, my dear young lady," said François, rising and leaning with her against the side of the little bridge, "you can do Madame Blanchet a great service. I like to think that it is towards her happiness and in her interest that you are friendly with Madame Sévère, and, that being so, you must get her to agree to a certain arrangement She requires two things which she can't in reason have at one and the same time . first to make Miller Blanchet's estates the surety for the payment of the lands he sold to pay her . second, to exact payment for the promissory-

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notes in her favour It is of no use for her to squeeze and press that miserable little heritage, she will never get out of it what she wants Make it clear to her that if she does not insist that we guarantee the payment of the land we can pay the notes, but that if she does not free us from the one debt we will not be able to pay her the other, and that in making charges which will exhaust our means without profit to her, she risks losing the lot ”

“ That seems to me quite obvious,” said Mariette, “ although I do not know anything about business matters, I can understand that much And if I happen to persuade her, François, which would be better for my sister-in law, to pay the notes or to be obliged to redeem the security ? ”

“ It would be worse to have to pay the notes for that would be more unjust We could protest against paying the notes and go to law about it, but a lawsuit costs money, and you know there is none in the house and that there never will be any Thus, whether your sister in law’s money goes in a lawsuit, or in payment to Madame Severe, it is all one to her, whereas it is to Madame Severe’s advantage to be paid without a lawsuit As she will be ruined in any case Madeleine would rather have all she has taken from her than have round her neck the millstone of a debt which might last a life time, for the buyers of Cadet Blanchet’s land are not likely to pay up This is known to Madame Severe, and one day she will have to take back those lands, not that that upsets her, for it is profitable to her to find them improved and to have had the interest on them at the same time So you see Madame Severe is not losing

anything by giving us our freedom, and she thus assures the payment of her bills."

"I will do as you tell me," said Mariette, "and if I fail you need have no respect for me"

"Well then, good luck, Mariette, and a pleasant walk," said François, stepping out of her way.

Mariette went to Dollins, very glad of a good excuse for appearing and for staying a while and for returning there during the next few days. Madame Sévère pretended to take in what she said, but in her heart she decided to be in no hurry about it. She had always hated Madeleine Blanchet for the respect which her husband had been obliged to give her in spite of himself. She thought she had her in the hollow of her hand for the rest of her life, and she would rather have given up the payment of the bills that she knew very well were not worth much than forgo the pleasure of tormenting her with the burden of an endless debt.

François knew this quite well, and he wanted to bring her to the point of claiming payment for this debt so that he could repurchase Jeannie's excellent property from those who had bought it for practically nothing. But when Mariette returned with her message, he realised that they were trying to put him off with words, that, on the one hand the child would be pleased to prolong the commission, and that, on the other hand, Madame Sévère had not yet reached the point of preferring the ruin of Madeleine to the payment of her bills.

To bring things to a climax, he took Mariette aside a couple of days later. "It is no good going to Dollins to-day, my dear young lady," said he. "Your

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sister-in law has heard, I don't know how, that you are often there, and she says it is not the right place for a well-brought-up girl I tried to get her to see that you are going there in her own interests, but she blamed me as much as you She said that she would rather be ruined than see you dishonoured, that you are in her charge, and that she has authority over you You will be forcibly prevented if you do not give up going of your own accord She will say nothing about it if you do not go back, for she does not wish to be unkind to you, but she is very angry with you and you really ought to ask her pardon "

François had set her off He was right in his estimation of Mariette's temper, which was as hasty and inflammable as her brother's had been

"Oh! ought I, indeed!" she exclaimed "Fancy obeying one's sister-in-law like a three-year-old child Anyone would think she was my mother, and I ought to obey her! And what makes her think I may lose my honour? Kindly tell her that it is as firmly established as hers, and better perhaps What does she know of Madame Severe, who is as good as anybody else? One need not be dishonest if one does not sit all day sewing, spinning, and saying one's prayers My sister-in-law is unjust to her because they are at variance over money-matters, and she thinks she can treat me as she pleases It is unwise of her, for if Madame Severe were so minded she would turn her out of house and home, and it proves that Madame Severe is less bad than her reputation, that she does not do this, but is patient And I, who was good enough to act as go between—look what thanks I get! Come, come, François, remember that the

most respectable folk are not always the most prudish, and that I do no worse in going to Madame Sévère than in stopping here."

"That remains to be seen!" said François, who wanted to bring things to a head; "your sister-in-law is very likely right in thinking that you are up to no good. And, look here, Mariette, I see you that are too keen on going there again, and that won't do at all. What you had to say about Madeleine's affairs has been said, and if Madame Sévère does not respond that means she does not want to respond. Then do not go there again, or I will believe, with Madeleine, that you are going there with no good intentions."

"Then you have decided, Mr. François," said Mariette in a fury, "that you are going to dictate to me as well. You think you are the master of the house in the place of my brother. You are not yet bearded enough to be in a position to rebuke me, and I warn you to leave me alone. Good-bye to you," she added, readjusting her cap; "if my sister-in-law wants me you can tell her that I am with Madame Sévère, and if she sends you to look for me, you will see what your reception will be."

Thereupon she slammed the door, and tripped lightly over to Dollins, but François was afraid her anger would have time to cool on the way, especially as the weather was frosty, and he let her get ahead, then, as she drew near Madame Sévère's house, he shot off like an arrow from a bow and caught her up, making her think Madeleine had sent him after her.

There he giped her until she raised her hand to strike him, but he dodged the blows, knowing that her anger would fall with every stroke, for a woman



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who beats anyone is cured of her ill temper He ran off then, and as soon as she was with Madame Severe she made a great fuss The poor child had no ill intentions, but in the first ardour of her fury she did not know how to keep calm, and she put Madame Severe in such a rage that François, who was going slowly along the hollow road, heard them from the other side of the hemp-field, sizzling and crackling like a fire in a hayloft

‘**T**HINGS turned out as he wished, and he was so satisfied that he went to Aigurande the next day, got his money from the curé, and returned the same night with his four crisp scraps of paper worth so much and making as little sound in his pocket as a crumb of bread. A week later they heard from Madame Sévère All the purchasers of Blanchet’s land were called upon to pay ; none of them could, and Madeleine was threatened with having to do so in their stead.

As soon as she realised this she came in full of fear, for François had said nothing of his plans.

“ Good ! ” he said, rubbing his hands, “ the merchant does not always gain, nor the thief always get away with the spoil. Madame Sévère is going to have bad luck and you are going to come off well. Never mind, my dear mother, go on as if you thought you were ruined The more you suffer the better pleased she will be to do what she thinks will turn out ill for you. But this loss is your gain, for you are going, by paying Madame Sévère, to get back all your son’s property.”

“ And how do you suppose I am to pay for this, my child ? ”

“ With the money which is in my pocket, and which is yours ”

Madeleine wanted to forbid him , but the waif was

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stubborn he said, and no one could turn him from his purpose. He dashed off to the lawyer to make over his two hundred crowns to Widow Blanchet, and Madame Severe was paid, however she liked it, as were the other creditors who were in league with her.

And even when François had carried out his intention of indemnifying the poor buyers he had still enough money left to go to court, and he told Madame Severe that he was going to start a lawsuit about the promissory notes she had got the dead man to sign by means of fraud. He spread a story which created a sensation in those parts. He said that in examining an old wall of the mill with a view to propping it up he had come across a money box belonging to the dead Madame Blanchet and full of ancient gold coins, which made Madeleine richer than she had ever been. So Madame Severe, overcome, agreed to an arrangement, hoping that François had control of some of this money found so opportunely, and that by being on good terms with him she might be able to lay hands on more than he exhibited to her. But she had her trouble for nothing, and he dealt so harshly with her that she was obliged to give up the bills for a hundred crowns.

By way of revenge she stirred Mariette by telling her that the money box which belonged to old Mother Blanchet ought to be divided between her and Jeannie, that she had a right to it, and that she ought to go to court against her sister-in-law.

Thus the waif was forced to tell the truth about the source of the money he had furnished, and the cure of Aigurande sent him the proofs in case of a lawsuit.

First he showed these proofs to Mariette, beseeching



her not to spread the story uselessly, and telling her that the best thing she could do would be to keep quiet. But Mariette did not keep quiet at all. Her brain was on fire with all these upsets in the family, and the poor child was terribly tempted. In spite of Madeleine's goodness to her and the fact that she treated her as if she were her own daughter, forgiving her all her moods, she disliked her sister-in-law and was jealous of her for a reason which she was ashamed to own. The truth is that in the course of her arguments and furies with François she had slowly become fond of him, without realising the change in her feelings. The more he lectured her for her caprices and her shortcomings the more eager she became to please him.

She was not the sort of girl to become embittered by her grief or even to melt into tears ; but she was for ever thinking that François, a handsome lad, rich, honest, kind to everyone, and very capable, was brave enough to give the last drop of his blood for the woman he loved , and that woman was not herself, although she could say that she was the prettiest and richest girl in the neighbourhood, and that she had dozens of suitors.

One day she opened her heart to her false friend Madame Sévère. It was in the pasture at the end of the road of Napes.\* There is an old apple-tree there and it was in flower, for while this had been going on they had reached the month of May, and as Mariette was watching her flock at the river-side Madame Sévère came to chat with her under the apple-blossom.

\* Nenufar, Nymphéa, Napée=Nenuphar, water-lily.

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But, by the mercy of Providence, François happened to be passing and overheard their words, for, seeing Madame Severe go into the field he guessed she had gone there to concoct some mischief against Madeleine, and as the river was low he walked noiselessly along the bank behind some of the bushes which grow so high in those parts that a hay cart would be hidden behind them. Once there he sat down on the sand holding his breath and listening with all his ears.

And this is what those two female tongues gossiped about. First Mariette said that of all her suitors none pleased her because of a miller, by no means gallant, but the only one who kept her awake at night. Madame Severe, however, wanted to marry her to a young man she knew who was so anxious to have the girl that he had promised her a fine present if she could manage to bring off a marriage between him and little Mariette Blanchet. Apparently she had even exacted a first instalment from him of this gift (as similarly from many others), so she did her best to sicken Mariette of François.

"A plague on the waif!" she said to her, "What, Mariette, a girl in your position marry a foundling! You would be called Madame Strawberry, for he has no other name. I should be ashamed for you, you poor creature. And, besides, you haven't a chance, for you would have to dispute him with your sister-in-law and he is her lover—as true as I stand here."

"Why, Madame Severe," cried Mariette, "you have more than once given me to understand that, but I can't believe it, my sister-in-law is too old."

"No, no, Mariette, your sister-in-law is not too old for that, she is hardly thirty, and this waif was only an

urchin when your brother found him very friendly with his wife. That is why one day he thrashed him soundly with the butt of his whip and sent him away."

François was dying to jump over the bushes and tell Madame Sévère that she lied, but he desisted and stayed quiet.

And then Madame Sévère said all sorts of things about him, credited him with lies and evil ways, so that François grew scarlet and could scarcely contain himself

"Then," said Mariette, "he intends to marry her now that she is a widow. He has already given her a good deal of his money and he would like at least to be able to enjoy that which he has bought back."

"But he will not be the highest bidder," said the other, "for Madeleine will look for someone richer now that she has got all she can out of him, and she will find someone. She must get a man to look after her property, and, while she is looking round for one, she keeps this great fool with her who serves her for nothing, and who relieves the tedium of her widowhood."

"If that is the way she behaves," said Mariette resentfully, "what a disreputable house I am living in! It will be no loss to leave it. Do you know, Madame Sévère, I am in very queer sort of house, and people will speak ill of me. Indeed, I can't stay there, I must get away. Ah, well, these religious folk talk ill of others and are secretly shameless themselves. I advise her not to speak badly of you and me after this.

"Well, I will say good-bye to her, and I will come to live with you. If she doesn't like it I will deal with

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her, and if she wants to force me to go back to her she must go to law about it, and I'll show her up then, do you understand ? ”

“ There is a better remedy, Mariette, and that is to get married as soon as you can She will not refuse her consent for she is in a hurry, I am sure, to get rid of you You interfere with her affair with the fine waif And you must not hesitate, do you see, or it will be said that he belongs to you both and no one will want to marry you then Get married to the man I advise you to take ”

“ So I will ! ” cried Mariette, breaking her shepherdess-crook against the old apple-tree “ I give you my word Go and find him, Madame Severe, and send him to the house this evening to ask my hand, and let our banns be published next Sunday ”

AS François climbed up the river bank where he had been in hiding listening to this feminine gossip, he was unhappier than ever before. His heart felt as heavy as lead, and half-way home he lost the courage to enter the house, and went along the road of Napes to sit down in the little spinney of oaks at the end of the meadow.

Once alone there he wept like a child, broken-hearted with grief and shame, for he was deeply ashamed of the accusation against himself and poor Madeleine whom he had loved with such chaste devotion all his life, getting nothing out of it in the end but the cruelty of evil tongues.

“My God, my God!” he said to himself, “how can the world be so wicked, and a woman like Madame Sévère have the impertinence to measure the honour of a woman like my dear mother by her own standards? And even that young fool, Mariette, who should be innocent and decent-minded, for she is but a child, and does not understand the meaning of evil, listens to these devilries and believes them as if she knew all about such things! Others think it too, in that case, and, as most of those who live this mortal life think evil exists everywhere, I suppose nearly everybody will think that because I love Madame Blanchet and she loves me it is a question of our being lovers together.”

Thereupon poor François began to examine his

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conscience and search his memory very deeply to see if his behaviour towards Madeleine had done anything to foster the evil ideas in Madame Severe's mind. Whether he had always acted wisely and, for lack of discretion and prudence, given anyone reason to think ill. But search as he might he could not find an instance of anything of the kind, for he had never thought in those terms.

And then, absorbed and dreamy, he murmured to himself "Well, and suppose my friendship had turned to love, what harm would there be in that now she is a widow and free to marry again? I have given her and Jeannie a good part of my money, but I still have enough to be a good match and she would not wrong her child in taking me for her husband. It would not be so very ambitious of me to aspire to that, no one could say I love her for her money. Certainly I am a waif, but she does not mind about that. She has loved me as if I were her son and that is the deepest of all affections, she could quite well love me in another way. I can see that her enemies will oblige me to leave her if I do not marry her, and I would die sooner than leave her again. Besides, she still needs me and it would be cowardly to leave so much on her hands when there are mine, as well as my money, at her service. Yes, all that is mine should be hers, and since she often talks of recompensing me in the end, I must put that idea out of her head by giving her an equal share with me in the eyes of God and the law. Yes, of course, she must keep her good name for the sake of her son and only by marrying will she not lose it. Why did I not think of it before, why did that wicked tongue have to put it into my mind? I was

too big a fool, too unsuspecting, and my poor mother is so good to others that she does not mind suffering at all herself. But all is for the best under the will of heaven, and Madame Sévère seeking to do me a bad turn has done me the kindness to point out my duty to me."

And, without wondering or considering further, François went back determined to speak to Madame Blanchet at once about his project, and to ask her on his knees to take him as her protector in the name of God and for eternity.

But when he got to Cormouet he saw Madeleine spinning her wool on the threshold of her door and for the first time in his life her face struck him with fear and uncertainty. Instead of going to her at once as usual and looking into her eyes with a frank gaze and asking her how she felt, he stopped on the little bridge as if he were examining the weir and watched her out of the corner of his eye. When she turned to him he looked the other way, not knowing himself what was the matter with him and why a thing which had seemed so simple and homely a little while ago should have become so hard to confess.

Then Madeleine called him, saying

"Come over here, François. We are all alone, so come and sit by my side and open your heart to me as to a father confessor, for I want the truth out of you"

This speech of Madeleine's quite comforted François, and sitting down beside her, he said :

"Be assured, my dear mother, that I will open my heart to you as to God, and that you will hear nothing but the truth in my confession."

And he imagined that perhaps she had heard something which had brought her to the same conclusion

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as himself. This made him feel quite happy and he waited for her to speak.

"François," said she, "you are twenty-one now, and you ought to think of settling down, have you any objection to that?"

"No, no, I have no other idea than yours," replied François, blushing with pleasure, "go on, my dear Madeleine."

"Very well," she went on, "I was waiting for you to tell me something, and I really believe that I know what would suit you. Well, since it is your wish it is also mine, and may be I thought of it before you did. I waited to see if the person in question would fall in love with you, and I fancy that if she does not care for you yet she soon will. Don't you think so too, and won't you tell me how far things have gone? Why are you looking at me with that startled expression? Haven't I made myself sufficiently clear? But I see you are shy, and I must help you out. Well, the poor child has been sulking all morning because you teased her a bit last evening, and perhaps she imagines you do not love her. But I have seen that you love her, and if you reproach her a little for her silly ways it is because you feel rather jealous. Do not let that stop you, François. She is young and pretty, which is dangerous, but if she really loved you she would soon learn to obey you."

"I would very much like to know," said François, unhappily, "of whom you are speaking, my dear mother, for I don't understand a word."

"Really?" said Madeleine, "you don't know? Did I dream it, or are you wanting to keep it secret from me?"



“A secret from you?” said François, taking Madeleine’s hand; then he let it go and took a corner of her apron which he crushed as if he were irritated, he held it to his lips as if he wanted to kiss it, and then let it go as he had loosed her hand, for he felt like weeping, falling into a rage, and then rather faint, all these emotions passed in quick succession.

“Why,” said Madeleine, astonished, “you are unhappy, my child, which proves that you are in love and that things are not going as you would like. But I assure you that Mariette is good-hearted, that she is unhappy too, and that if you were to tell her frankly what you feel, she on her side would tell you that she thinks of no one but you.”

François stood up, and without saying a word began to walk up and down the yard, and then he returned and said to Madeleine

“I am astonished at what is in your mind, Madame Blanchet. As for me, I have never thought of such a thing, and I know very well that Miss Mariette neither cares for nor esteems me.”

“Come, come,” said Madeleine, “disappointment makes you talk like that, my child. Have I not seen you chatting with her, watched you say words incomprehensible to me, but which she appeared to understand for she blushed like fire? Do I not know that she leaves the meadow every day and gives her flock to anyone’s charge? Our crops suffer if her sheep gain, but I would rather not restrain her nor talk to her about sheep when her brain is all on fire with thoughts of love and marriage. The poor child is at an age when one does not look after one’s flocks very well, and controls one’s heart still less easily. But it is

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a great piece of luck for her, François, that instead of being infatuated with one of these bad lots I feared she would meet at Madame Severe's she has had the good sense to fall in love with you I, too, am very glad to think that, married to my sister-in-law whom I regard almost as a daughter, you would live and work near me, you would be in my family, and I could discharge my debt to you for all the good you have done by having you to live here, in doing things for you, and bringing up your children Therefore do not destroy the happiness I have built up by childish nonsense Try to see clearly and cure yourself of your jealousy If Mariette likes to make herself look pretty it is to charm you If she is a bit careless lately it is that she is thinking too much about you, and if sometimes she talks to me in too lively a fashion it is because she is in a temper at your teasing and does not know on whom to avenge herself But that she wants to be sensible and that she is good-natured is proved by the fact that she realises how kind and good you are and that she wants to have you for her husband "

"You are good, my dear mother," said François, saddened, "yes, you are good, for you believe in the goodness of others, but you are mistaken I can tell you that if Mariette is good too, and I will not deny it, fearing to make mischief between you, it is another kind of goodness, quite unlike yours, and which, for that reason, I do not appreciate at all Then do not talk to me about her I swear faithfully to you that I am no more in love with her than I am with old Catherine, and that if she cares for me it is very unfortunate because I do not feel that way at all

“Do not say anything to her to make her admit that she loves me. It would be unwise and you would make us enemies. On the contrary, you must listen to what she has to say to you this evening and let her marry Jean Aubard for she has decided to do so. Let her get married as soon as possible, it is no good her staying with you. She does not like it and it gives you no pleasure”

“Jean Aubard!” said Madeleine, “he won’t suit her, he is a very stupid fellow, and she is too clever to submit to a man with no brains.”

“He is rich and she won’t submit to him. She will order him about and he is just the man for her. Won’t you believe your friend, my dear mother? You know I have never given you bad advice. Let this young woman go, for she does not love you as she should, and she does not realise your true worth.”

“It is disappointment which makes you talk like this, François,” said Madeleine, putting her hand on his head and shaking it a little as if to force the truth out of it. But François, angered that she would not believe him, drew back and said to her in a discontented voice that it was the first time in his life he had had an argument with her.

“You are not fair to me, Madame Blanchet. I tell you that this girl does not like you. You force me to say it against my will for I did not come here to stir up strife between you. But I tell it you because I know it to be true. And you still think I love her? Why, it must be you who do not love me any longer since you will not believe me.”

And, sick with grief, François went to weep alone by the fountain.

**M**ADELEINE was even more upset than François and would have liked to go to him and question him further and comfort him, but she was prevented by the entrance of Mariette who came with an odd expression on her face to speak to her about Jean Aubard, and tell her of his offer of marriage. Madeleine could not overcome the notion that all this savoured of a lovers' quarrel and tried to speak to her of François, thereupon Mariette replied in a tone which made her very unhappy and which she could not understand.

"Let those who love waifs keep them for their own amusement. As for me, I am a decent girl and if my poor brother is dead I will not allow my honour to be insulted. I am quite independent, Madeleine, and if the law forces me to ask your advice it does not force me to take it when you advise me ill. I ask you therefore not to refuse me now for I could cross you later on."

"I do not know what is the matter with you, my poor child," said Madeleine very sweetly but sadly, "you speak to me as if you neither esteemed nor cared for me. I think that you are in some trouble which has dazed you for the time. I beseech you to take two or three days to think it over. I will tell Jean Aubard to come back, and if you feel the same after you have thought about it in quietness I will

make no objection to your marriage as he is a decent man and comfortably off. But you are so upset that you cannot know your own mind nor judge of the affection I have for you. I feel very sad and I see that you do too, so I will forgive you."

Mariette tossed her head as a sign that she scorned such a pardon and she went to put on her silk apron to receive Jean Aubard, who came an hour later with the buxom Madame Sévère in her best clothes.

Madeleine then began to think that Mariette must dislike her if she could bring into her house on a family matter a woman who was her enemy and whom she could not see without blushing. She behaved, however, very pleasantly as she met her and offered her refreshment without showing spite or rancour. She was afraid of driving Mariette to extremes in going against her. She said that she would not oppose the wishes of her sister-in-law, but that she asked three days before giving an answer.

Upon which Madame Sévère remarked insolently that it was a very long time ; and Madeleine responded quietly that it was very short. And then Jean Aubard went off looking as stupid as possible and giggling like a simpleton, for he never doubted that Mariette was madly in love with him. He had paid for that belief and Madame Sévère had given him his money's worth.

As she went, the latter remarked to Mariette that she was having some pancakes made at her house to celebrate the engagement and that even if Madame Blanchet withheld her permission the feast must be eaten. Madeleine pointed out that it was not customary for a young girl to go with a youth to whom permission had not yet been accorded.

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"In that case I won't go," said Mariette, feeling very provoked

"But of course you will, you must come," cried Madame Severe, "are you not your own mistress?"

"No, no," retorted Mariette, "don't you see that my sister-in-law has commanded me to stay at home?"

And she went into the room, slamming the door. But she only walked through it and, going out of the house by the backway, she rejoined Madame Severe and the young man at the end of the field, laughing and insolent.

Poor Madeleine could not help crying when she saw how things were.

"François is right," she thought, "that child does not care for me and is ungrateful. She will not understand that I act for the best for her, that I seek her happiness, and that I want to prevent her from doing something that she will regret. She has listened to bad counsel, and I am forced to see that wretched Severe bring malice and misery into my family. I have done nothing to deserve all this trouble, and I must resign myself to the will of God. Luckily my poor François saw more clearly than I. He would have suffered had he taken such a wife!"

She went to look for him to tell him what she thought, but she found him weeping near the fountain, and, imagining that he was unhappy about Mariette, she told him that she could console him. The more she talked, however, the more miserable she made him, for he saw that she would not understand the truth and that she could not feel for him as he wanted her to feel.

That evening after Jeannie was in bed and asleep

in the room, François stayed a while with Madeleine trying to explain. He said to begin with that Mariette was jealous of her, that Madame Sévère said infamous things and told abominable lies.

But Madeleine did not see anything in this.

“What could they say about me ?” she asked simply ; “what could put jealousy into the head of that poor little fool of a Mariette ? You are mistaken, François, it is something else, some reason we shall learn later on. As for jealousy, that is impossible , I am too old to stand in the way of a young and pretty girl. I am nearly thirty, and for a peasant woman who has had a great deal of trouble and worry that is old enough to be your mother. Only a devil dare say that I look on you as other than a son, and Mariette must have seen that I wanted her to marry you. No, no, don’t believe that she thought such wicked things, or don’t tell me about them, my child. It would cause me too much shame and misery.”

“However,” said François, forcing himself to go on, and bending over the hearth so that Madeleine should not see his confusion, “Miller Blanchet thought such wicked things when he made me leave the house ”

“You know that now then, François ?” said Madeleine. “How do you know ? I never told you and I would never have told you. If Catherine has mentioned it she had no business to. Such an idea must shock and pain you as it did me But do not let us think about it any more and let us forgive my dead husband for it. The shame falls on Madame Sévère, but she can no longer be jealous of me. I have no husband. I am as old and ugly as she could

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desire nowadays, and I do not mind, for that gives me the right to be respected, to treat you as my son, and to look for a nice young woman for you who would be glad to live here and who would love me as her mother. That is all I ask, François, and it will come to us—don't worry. So much the worse for Mariette if she scorns the happiness I would have given her.

"Go to bed now, my child, and take heart again. If I thought I stood in the way of your marriage I would send you away at once, but you can be sure no one will gossip about me, for one never imagines the impossible."

Listening to Madeleine, François thought she must be right, he was so used to believing her. He got up to say good night and to go, but, taking her hand, for the first time he thought of looking to see if she was old and ugly. She was so serious and sad she deceived herself about her appearance, for she was as pretty as she had ever been.

Suddenly François saw that she was young and found her perfectly beautiful, and his heart began to thump as if he had been climbing into a belfry. He went to sleep in the mill where he had his bed among the sacks of flour, hemmed in with a square of planks. When he was alone there he began to tremble and gasp as if he had a fever. He was lovesick. For the first time in his life he was scorched by the great flame which had gently warmed him up till now.



**F**ROM that moment the waif was so sad that it was pitiful to see him. He worked as much as four men, but he was no longer joyful, nor did he get any rest, and Madeleine could not make him say what was the matter with him. It was of no use for him to swear that he neither loved nor regretted Mariette, Madeleine would not believe him and could find no other reason for his misery. She was sorry to see him suffering and not to be in his confidence as usual, and it astonished her very much that the young man was so obstinate and proud in his trouble.

As hers was not a tormenting nature she determined not to speak of it again to him. She tried to make Mariette come round, but she was so ill-received that she lost courage and desisted, sick at heart, but anxious not to show her pain lest she should add to the unhappiness of others.

François went on serving her and helping her with the same courage and devotion as before. As of old he was with her as much as possible. But he did not talk to her in the old way. He was always confused in her presence. He became as red as fire and as white as snow all in the same minute, so, often, indeed that she thought him ill and took his wrist to see if he were feverish, but he drew back as if her touch hurt him and sometimes he reproached her in words she did not understand.

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Every day this trouble grew between them. Preparations for Mariette's marriage with Jean Aubard were going on, and the day on which she would terminate her period of mourning was that fixed for the wedding. Madeleine dreaded that day for she was afraid that François would be driven mad, and she wanted to send him to his old master, Jean Vertaud, at Aigurande, for a time to distract him from his misery. But François was anxious that Mariette should not think in the same terms as Madeleine was determined to think. He showed no sign of grief in her presence. He was friendly with the young man, and when he met Madame Severe in the road he joked with her to show her that he had no fear of her. He was present at the wedding, and, as he was obviously glad to see that girl leave their house and to have Madeleine rid of a false friend, no one thought he had ever had any love for her.

Madeleine herself began to think this must be the case, or at least to imagine that he must have got over it. She said good-bye to Mariette with her usual good nature, but that young woman, feeling jealous of her on account of the waif, took care to show her that she left her without regret or kindly feelings. Accustomed as she was to being hurt, good Madeleine wept for this naughtiness and prayed God for her.

At the end of a week François suddenly announced that he had business at Aigurande and that he was going away for five or six days, which did not astonish her and even pleased her, she thought a change would do him good for he seemed to her to be ill with suppressed grief.

As for François, his trouble, so far from being less

as it appeared, grew daily. He thought of nothing else, and, sleeping or waking, far or near, Madeleine was always in his thoughts and her image before his eyes. It is true that all his life had been passed in loving and thinking of her. But until this time the thought had been pleasurable and comforting instead of sheer misery and disquietude. He had been so content to be her son and her friend that he had not wished for anything more ; but his love had changed in character and he was most unhappy.

He feared she could never change like him. He kept reminding himself that he was too young, that she had known him as a miserable child, and that he had caused her too much suffering and been too great a nuisance to the poor woman , he feared that rather than feeling proud of him she regarded him with pity and compassion. In addition, she was so lovely and kind in his eyes, so far above him, and so desirable, that when she said she was no longer young or beautiful he thought that she did this in order to prevent him from courting her.

Since, however, Madame Sévère and Mariette with their friends were destroying her reputation on his account he began to be afraid lest the scandal might reach Madeleine's ears, that she might be annoyed about it and want to send him away. He said to himself that she was too good-natured to ask him to go, but that she would continue to suffer on his account as she had done before , so he determined to go and ask the curé of Aigurande for his advice on the matter, knowing him to be a just and God-fearing man.

He went, but could not find him as he had gone to

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visit the bishop, so François went to stay with Jean Vertaud for two or three days until the cure should return

His old master was the same decent fellow and good friend as formerly, and he found that his daughter Jeannette was about to be married to a nice man for reasons other than adoration of him, but for whom she had considerably more esteem than dislike. This put François at his ease with her as he had not been before, and as the next day was a Sunday he talked to her for a long while and told her confidentially of all the misery from which he had been able to rescue Madame Blanchet

As Jeannette was quite sharp enough to put two and two together she gathered that this friendship went a good deal deeper than the waif admitted. And suddenly she seized his arm and said to him

"François, you must not hide things from me. Now I am sensible and you see that I am not ashamed to tell you that I thought more of you than you did of me. You knew it and you made no response to my advances. But you did not try to mislead me and you did not do what a good many people might have done in your place. For that conduct and for your faithfulness to the woman whom you love more than anyone, I admire you, and instead of denying my feelings for you I am glad to remember them. I expect you like me the better for having told you this, and you will do me the justice of recognising that I bear no grudge for your coldness. I would like to give you one more token of my esteem, and this is how it appears to me. you love Madeleine Blanchet not so much as a mother, but entirely as a woman who

is young and agreeable to you and whose husband you hope to become."

"Oh!" said François, blushing like a girl, "I love her as my mother and respect her from my heart."

"I have no doubt of that," replied Jeannette, "but you love her in two ways, for your face betrays one while your words tell me the other. Oh, well, François, you dare not tell her that which you dared not confess to me, and you do not know if she will respond to your double way of loving."

Jeannette Vertaud spoke with such sweetness and sense, and showed such true friendship for François, that he had not the courage to tell a lie, and pressing her hand he told her that he looked upon her as his sister and that she was the only person in the world to whom he could reveal his secret.

Jeannette then asked him a number of questions and he answered truthfully and with assurance. She said to him.

"François, my friend, now I understand. I cannot know what Madeleine Blanchet feels, but I see that you could stay with her ten years without being bold enough to tell her what is on your mind. Well, I will find out for you and tell you what she feels. To-morrow my father, you and I will set out so that we may make her acquaintance and pay a friendly visit to the kind woman who brought up our friend François. You will take my father for a walk round the place as if to ask his advice, and I will stay and talk to Madeleine. I will go slowly and I will not tell her about your feelings until I am sure about hers."

François nearly fell on his knees before Jeannette

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to thank her for her goodness, and then Jean Vertaud was consulted with the waif's permission

They set off the next day, Jeannette riding behind her father, while François went on ahead an hour earlier to inform Madeleine of the visit

François reached Cormouet in the dusk. He was caught in a storm on the way, but he did not mind, for he had great hope of what Jeannette might do, and his heart was lighter than at his departure

Raindrops clung to the bushes, and the blackbirds sang like mad to greet the mocking glance flung them by the sun as he sank behind the hill of Grand Corlay. The fledglings in chirping flocks fluttered from branch to branch as François passed and their twittering cheered his spirits. He thought of the time when as a child he sauntered, loitering and dreaming, through the meadows, whistling to attract the birds. And at that moment he noticed a bullfinch which circled round his head as if it were an emblem of luck and good fortune. That reminded him of an old song about a bullfinch and its young which Mother Zabelle used to croon in the ancient language of our country as a lullaby for him.

Madeleine had not expected him so early. She had even feared that he would not return at all, and seeing him she could not help running to him and kissing him, which made him blush so much that she was surprised. He informed her of the visitors who were on their way, and that she should not mind, for it seemed as if he was as frightened lest she should guess as he was unhappy that she did not, he hinted that Jean Vertaud had some thought of buying property in the district.

Then Madeleine began to prepare the best feast she could for François' friends.

Jeannette was the first to enter the house while her father took their horse round to the stable, and as soon as she saw Madeleine she felt a great affection for her which Madeleine reciprocated; and having shaken hands they kissed one another as if for the sake of their love for François. They began to talk without restraint as if they had known one another for a long time. The truth is that they were a pair of good worthy women. Jeannette could not help feeling a trifle distressed to see Madeleine so much loved by the man for whom she herself still felt affection, but she was not at all jealous and she felt comforted by the good deed she was about to do.

On her side Madeleine, seeing this girl so buxom and attractive, imagined that it must have been for love of her that François had been so sad, that she had agreed to marry him, and had come to tell her this. She did not feel jealous either for she had never thought of François except as she thought of her own child.

But before nightfall, after supper, when Vertaud, tired by the journey, went off to bed, Jeannette led Madeleine outside, telling François to keep out of the way a little with Jeannie, and to come back when she turned down her apron which was tucked up at one corner.

She executed her mission so cleverly that Madeleine had no chance to misunderstand. She was very much astonished as the story was told. At first she thought that it was another proof of François' good-nature, that he wished to still the evil tongues and to serve her all his life. And she would have

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refused, thinking that it was too great a sacrifice on the part of so young a man to marry a woman older than himself, that he would repent later on, and that he would not remain faithful to her without boredom and regret. But Jeannette informed her that the waif was in love with her so deeply that his health and peace of mind were affected.

Madeleine found it difficult to believe, for she had lived so retired and chaste a life, never flirting or appearing outside her home or listening to compliments, that she had no idea that she was likely to be attractive in the eyes of a young man.

"And," Jeannette added, "since he finds you so agreeable, and since he will die of grief if you refuse him, will you continue to misunderstand and not to believe that which you are told? If you do, it must be because you dislike the poor child and have no wish to make him happy."

"Don't say that, Jeannette," cried Madeleine, "I love him nearly as much, if not quite as much as my Jeannie, and if I had guessed that he loved me in another way I would not, as you can imagine, have been so placid in my friendship. But I had no idea of anything of the kind, and I am still so dazed that I do not know how to answer you. I implore you to give me time to think and to talk to him so that I may be sure it is no passing infatuation, or a result of being crossed in some other love, or even because he thinks it is his duty—for that is what I am most afraid of, and I feel he has rewarded me sufficiently for the care I took of him and that to give me himself as well as his freedom would be too much unless he really loves me as you imagine."



On hearing that Jeannette let fall her apron, and François, who was not far distant and was watching her, came towards them. Jeannette tactfully asked Jeannie to show her the fountain, and they went off leaving Madeleine and François together.

But Madeleine who had thought she could question the waif quite calmly felt suddenly tongue-tied and confused like a fifteen-year-old girl. It is not age, but innocence of mind and action which causes that timidity so charming to see, and François, seeing his dear mother blushing and trembling like himself guessed that was more in his favour than her usual calm manner. He took her hand and then her arm, but could say nothing to her. Still trembling, she desired to go after Jeannie and Jeannette, but he held her back and made her turn round with him. And Madeleine, feeling that his will made him bold and able to overcome her resistance, realised better than by words that it was no longer her child, the waif, but her lover, François, who was walking by her side.

When they had gone a little way without speaking, but arm-in-arm and as close as possible, François said to her.

“Let us go to the fountain perhaps I shall find my tongue there.”

At the fountain they found no Jeannette and no Jeannie, for they had gone in, but François found courage to speak, remembering that it was there he had met Madeleine the first time, and there that he had said farewell to her eleven years later.

It seems that he spoke well and that Madeleine did not refuse him, for they were still there at midnight,

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she weeping for joy, and he thanking her on his knees for consenting to accept him as her husband

"That is the end of the story," said the hemp dresser, "for the wedding is too long to tell about I was there, and the same day that the waif married Madeleine in the parish of Mers, Jeannette also was married in the parish of Aigurande And Jean Vertaud invited François and his wife and Jeannie, who was very glad about it all, with their friends, relatives, and acquaintances, to his house for the wedding feast, which was the finest and most delightful I have ever attended "

"Then it is a true story all through ?" asked Sylvine Courtioux

"If it is not, it might well have been," replied the hemp dresser, "but if you don't believe me, go and see "



# THE CASTLE OF PICTORDU



# THE CASTLE OF PICTORDU

## CHAPTER I

### THE BREAKDOWN

**I**N the very heart of a wild country, called in those times the province of Gévaudan, stood all alone in the wild tracts of forest and mountain the forsaken Castle of Pictordu. Sad and melancholy, it had the look of being wearied like a person who, after having received fine company and given grand entertainments, feels himself dying poor, infirm, and forsaken.

Monsieur Flochardet, a renowned painter in the south of France, was driving in a post-chaise on the road which bordered the little river. He had with him his only daughter, Diane, eight years old, whom he had fetched from the Convent of the Visitandines de Mende, and whom he was bringing home on account of an intermittent fever which had attacked the child every other day during the last three months. The doctor had recommended native air. Flochardet was taking her to a pretty villa he possessed in the neighbourhood of Arles.

Leaving Mende the previous evening, the father and daughter had made a detour in order to visit a relation, and they were to sleep that night at Saint-Jean-du Gard, called in those days Saint-Jean-Gardonenque. It was long before the days of railroads. In every way things went less rapidly then than

now. They were therefore not to arrive at home until the following day. Their progress was all the slower from the road being detestable. Monsieur Flochardet got out and walked beside the postilion.

"What is that before us ?" he asked. "Is it a ruin ? Or a mass of white rocks ?"

"How, sir," said the postilion, "do you not recognise the Castle of Pictordu ?"

"I cannot recognise it, for this is the first time I have seen it. I have never taken this road before, and I shall never take it again ; it is frightful, and we do not get on at all."

"Have patience, sir. This old road is more direct than the new one, you would have had still seven leagues to do before bedtime if you had taken the new road, and this way you have only two."

"But if we take five hours doing this bit of road I do not see that we gain much."

"You are joking, sir, in two short hours we shall be at Saint-Jean-Gardonenque."

Monsieur Flochardet sighed, thinking of his little Diane. It was the day of the fever being on her. He had hoped to reach the inn and to put her to bed, to rest and warm her before the hour of the feverish attack. The air of the ravine was damp, the sun was set, he feared that she would become seriously ill if she were to shiver from the fever while in the carriage exposed to the cool night air, and the jolts of the old road.

"Ah then," said he to the postilion, "this is a disused road ?"

"Yes, sir, this is the road that was made for the Castle, and the Castle has been disused also."

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“ It seems to me still very rich and vast , why is it no longer inhabited ? ”

“ Because the proprietor, who inherited it when it had already begun to fall into ruin, has not the means of repairing it It belonged in former times to a rich lord, who gave balls, plays, theatricals, and banquets, and I don't know what else He ruined himself over it His descendants never recovered, no more did the old Castle, which has still a fine look, but which one of these days will fall from the heights there into the river, and consequently over this road that we are now on ”

“ Provided that it will allow us to pass this evening let it fall at once if it likes ! But why has it this strange name of Pictordu ? ”

“ Because of that rock that you see among the woods above the Castle, and which is twisted (*tordu*) as if by fire They say in old times all the country was on fire They call that the country of volcanoes I'll lay a wager you never saw anything like it before ”

“ Yes, indeed I have seen many, but that does not interest me for the moment I beg you, my friend, to remount your horse and to go as fast as you can ”

“ Pardon, sir, not yet We have to pass the waterfalls of the park , there is no longer any water, but there is a great deal of rubbish and rough ground, and I must lead my horses carefully Fear nothing for the little lady, there is no danger ”

“ Possibly,” replied Flochardet , “ but I would rather take her in my arms, so warn me in time ”

“ We are there now, sir, do as you like ”

The artist stopped the carriage and drew out little



Diane, who was growing drowsy, and began to feel the uneasiness of the fever.

“Go up that flight of steps,” said the postilion, “you will cross the terrace, and you will reach the turn of the road as soon as I.”

Flochardet mounted the steps, still carrying the child. It was, notwithstanding its state of dilapidation, a truly seignorial staircase, with a balustrade which had been very beautiful, and elegant statues placed at regular distances. The terrace, formerly flagged, had now become like a garden of wild plants which had grown up in the disjointed stones, and had mingled with rarer and more precious shrubs, formerly planted in clumps. Honeysuckle was entwined with enormous clusters of dog-roses, jessamines flourished amongst brambles; cedars of Lebanon stood erect above indigenous firs and rustic ibexes. The ivy carpeted the ground or suspended itself in garlands; strawberry plants creeping over the paths traced arabesques upon the pedestals of the statues.

This terrace, invaded by free vegetation, had perhaps never been so beautiful, but Flochardet was a drawing-room painter, and he did not much love Nature. Besides, all this luxuriance of wild plants made walking difficult in the twilight. He feared the thorns for the pretty face of his child, and he advanced, guarding her as best he could, when he heard below him a noise of horses' hoofs resounding on the stones, and the voice of the postilion in lamentation, sometimes moaning and groaning, now swearing as if some misfortune had happened to him. What was to be done? How was it possible to fly to his help with a sick child in his arms? Little Diane helped him out

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of his difficulty by her sweetness and her good sense. The cries of the postilion had quite awakened her, and she understood that the poor man must be extricated from some danger.

"Go, dear papa, run!" said she to her father. "I shall do quite well here. This garden is pretty, and I like it very much. Leave me your cloak, I will wait for you without stirring. You will find me at the foot of this large vase. Do not be anxious."

Flochardet enveloped her in his cloak and ran to see what had happened. The postilion was not hurt, but in wishing to drive over the ruins had upset the carriage, and two of the wheels were absolutely broken. One of the horses had fallen down and had broken its knees. The postilion was in despair, he was really to be pitied, but Flochardet could not restrain his anger, useless though it was.

What was to become of him at the approach of night, with a little girl too heavy to carry over two leagues of country, that is to say, during a three hours' walk? There was, however, nothing else to be done. He left the postilion to get out of his trouble alone, and returned to Diane.

But, instead of finding her asleep at the foot of the vase as he expected, he saw her coming to meet him, wide awake and quite gay.

"Papa," said she, "I have heard everything from the terrace. The coachman is not hurt, but the horses are injured and the carriage is broken. We cannot go farther to night, and I was fretting at your uneasiness when the Lady called me by my name. I looked round, and I saw that she stretched her arm towards the Castle, it was to tell me to go in there."

Let us go ! I am sure she will be very pleased, and that we shall be very happy with her."

"Of what lady are you speaking, my child ? This Castle is deserted, and I see no one."

"You do not see the Lady ? That must be because it is getting dark, but I see her quite well still. See ! She is showing us the door by which we should enter."

Flochardet looked where Diane pointed. It was a statue, life-size, which represented an allegorical figure "Hospitality," perhaps, and which, with an elegant and graceful gesture, seemed to point out to the travellers the entrance to the Castle.

"You have mistaken a statue for a lady," said he to his daughter, "and you dreamt that she spoke to you."

"No, dear father, I was not dreaming, we must do as she wishes."

Flochardet would not contradict the sick child. He cast a glance at the rich façade of the Castle, which, with its vesture of climbing plants hanging from the balconies and from the projections of the sculptured stone, still appeared solid and magnificent.

"Indeed," he said to himself, "this is a shelter until we can find a better, and I shall surely find a corner where the little one can rest, while I consider what is best to be done."

He entered with Diane, who led him resolutely by the hand, under a superb archway, and going straight before them they penetrated into a large expanse which was, in fact, but a flower-garden of wild mint and St. John's wort with white leaves surrounded by pillars, more than one of which lay on the ground. The others supported the remains of a dome which showed daylight through in a thousand places. This

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ruin did not appear very prepossessing to Flochardet, and he was going to retrace his steps when the postilion joined him

“Follow me, master,” he said, “this way there is a pavilion still strong and firm, where you can pass the night very well”

“Must we then pass the night here? If we cannot reach the town let us at least find some farm or country house”

“Impossible, sir, without leaving your baggage in the carriage, which can go no farther”

“It will not be difficult to remove my luggage, of which there is but little, and to load one of your horses with it I will ride the other with my daughter, and you shall show us the road to the nearest house”

“There is no dwelling that we can reach to night. The mountain is too steep, and my poor horses are both done for. I don’t know how we shall get out of this place even in broad daylight. Mercy on us! The first thing is to get the little lady to rest. I will find you a room where there are still doors and shutters, and where the ceiling will not fall in. I have found a sort of stable for my horses, and as I have my little bag of oats for them, and as you have some provisions for yourself, we are not likely to die of want to-night. I will go and fetch your luggage, and the carriage cushions to sleep on, one night is soon over”

“Come,” said Flochardet, “let us do as you say, since you have recovered your wits. No doubt there is some keeper here whom you know and who will show us hospitality?”

“There is no caretaker here, the Castle of Pictordu keeps itself. In the first place, there is nothing to

take; besides but I will tell you all that later. Here we are at the door of the ancient Baths. I know how to open it. Go in, sir, there are neither rats, bats, nor serpents. Wait for me, there's nothing to be afraid of."

In fact, whilst they were talking they had, after crossing several dwelling-rooms more or less in ruins, reached a low and massive pavilion built in a severe style. This was, like the rest of the Castle, a building of the time of the Renaissance, but, whilst the façade of the Castle offered a strange mixture of different styles of architecture, this pavilion, situated in a court in the form of a cloister, was an imitation on a small scale of the ancient hot baths, and the interior was enclosed and in tolerable preservation. The postilion had brought one of the carriage lanterns with its candle. He struck a light, and Flochardet was able to ascertain that it was possible to pass the night there. He sat down on the base of a column, and would have taken Diane on his knees whilst the postilion went to fetch the cushions and baggage

"No, thank you, dear papa," she said. "I am delighted to pass the night in this pretty Castle, and I no longer feel ill. Let us go and help the postilion, it will be more quickly done. I am sure that you are hungry, and I think that I too shall enjoy tasting the cakes and fruit you put in a little basket for me."

Flochardet, seeing his little invalid so valiant, led her away, and she knew how to make herself useful. At the end of a quarter of an hour, the cushions, cloaks, boxes, baskets, in a word all that the carriage contained, were transported into the hall of the old domain. Diane did not forget her doll, whose arm

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had been broken in the adventure. She longed to cry, but seeing that her papa had to regret the loss of several more precious articles which were broken, she had the courage not to complain. The postilion found some consolation in ascertaining that two bottles of good wine had escaped the disaster, and while carrying them he looked at them affectionately.

"Come," said Flochardet to him, "for after all you have found us a night's lodging and have shown yourself devoted to our service. What is your name?"

"Romaneche, sir!"

"Well, Romaneche, you will sup with us, and sleep in this large hall if you like."

"No, monsieur, I will go and see to my horses, but a glass of wine should never be refused, especially after a misfortune. Besides, I will wait on you first. The little lady would like some water, perhaps? I know where the spring is. I will arrange her bed, too, I know how to take care of children, I have some of my own!"

Thus speaking, the good Romaneche prepared everything. The supper was composed of a cold fowl, a loaf, and a ham, and some dainties which Diane nibbled with pleasure.

They had neither chairs, nor table, but, in the centre of the hall, a marble fountain formed a little amphitheatre, on the steps of which they could sit at ease. The spring which had formerly supplied the bath, and which gushed forth still in the cloister, afforded excellent water which little Diane drank out of her silver goblet. Flochardet gave a bottle of wine to Romaneche, reserving the other for himself, and they filled their glasses. Whilst thus employed, the painter

watched his child. She was merry, and would willingly have chattered instead of sleeping; but when she was no longer hungry, he induced her to go to rest, and they made her a comfortable little bed with cushions and cloaks in a marble trough which was by the side of the fountain. The weather was superb; it was midsummer, and the moon began to shine. Besides, they had a light, and the place did not look at all melancholy. The interior had been painted in fresco. One could still see the birds flying amid the wreaths in the ceiling, trying to catch butterflies larger than themselves. On the walls, nymphs danced in a circle, holding one another by the hand. It is true that a leg was wanting to one, the hand or a head to another. Stretched on her improvised bed, with her doll in her arms, Diane lay quiet awaiting sleep. She looked at these maimed dancers and thought nevertheless they had a grand and festive air.

## CHAPTER II

### THE VEILED LADY

WHEN the postilion Romaneche, acting as footman, had removed the remains of the supper, and Monsieur Flochardet thought his child was asleep "Do explain to me," said the artist, "why this Castle is left to take care of itself, you gave me to understand that there was a particular reason for it"

Romaneche hesitated a little, but the good wine of the traveller had loosened his tongue and he answered thus

"You will laugh at me, sir, I am sure You clever people, you don't believe in certain things"

"Come, my man, I understand you I do not believe in supernatural things, I grant you But I like marvellous stories This Castle must have its legend, tell it me, I shall not laugh"

"Well, sir, this is it I told you that Pictordu Castle guarded itself, that was one way of saying it It is guarded by the Veiled Lady"

"And the Veiled Lady? Who is she?"

"Ah! That is what no one knows! Some say that she is a living person who is dressed in ancient fashion, others that she is the spirit of a Princess who lived a long time ago, and who comes back here every night"

"We shall have the pleasure of seeing her then?"



“ No, sir, you will not see her. She is a very polite lady who wishes people to come of their good will to see her ; sometimes she even invites the passers-by to come in, and if they do not pay attention she upsets their carriage or makes their horses fall down. Or, if they are on foot, she rolls so many stones down on to the road that they cannot pass. She must have cried out to us from the top of the donjon or from the terrace some word of invitation that we did not hear ; for, say what you will, the accident which happened to us is not natural, and if you had determined to continue your road, worse would have happened.”

“ Ah ! Very well, I understand now why you found it impossible to take us farther.”

“ Farther ! And even in the town you would have been worse off, and had dirtier lodgings ; possibly the supper might have been better . . . though I found it very good ”

“ It was quite enough, and I am not unhappy at being here ; but I want to know all about the Veiled Lady. When one comes here without being invited, no doubt she is displeased ? ”

“ She is not angry, and she does not show herself ; one never sees her, no one has ever seen her , she is not wicked, and she never does any harm to anyone ; but one hears a voice which cries ‘ Go ! ’ and if you wish it or not, you feel yourself obliged to obey as if something strong like forty pairs of horses were dragging you.”

“ Then, this might happen to us, for she has not invited us at all.”

“ Excuse me, sir, I am sure she must have called us, but we did not pay attention.”

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Flochardet then recollected that little Diane believed she was called by the statue on the terrace

"Speak lower," said he to the postilion, "the child dreamed something of the sort, and I would not have her believe in such follies"

"Ah!" cried Romaneche simply, "she heard it! That was it, master! The Veiled Lady adores children, and when she saw you pass, without believing in her invitation, she made the carriage overturn!"

"And threw down your horses? That is an evil turn for so hospitable a person!"

"To tell you the truth, sir, my horses are not much hurt, a few scratches, and that is all. It was the carriage that she wanted, but if it can be mended to-morrow or another can be procured for you, you will not be many hours behindhand, as you must have passed the night at Saint-Jean-Gardonque. Perhaps you are expected somewhere and are afraid of causing anxiety by not arriving on the appointed day?"

"Certainly," replied Flochardet, who was a little afraid of the philosophic indifference of the good man, or his too great submission to some new caprice of the Veiled Lady, "the first thing in the morning we must set about making up for lost time"

The truth is, Flochardet was not expected home on a fixed day. His wife did not know that Diane was ill at the Convent, and she did not reckon on the pleasure of seeing her before the holidays

"Let us see," said Flochardet to Romaneche, "I think it is about time to sleep. Will you sleep here? I do not mind if you think this better than being with your horses"

"Thank you, master, you are too good, but I can't

sleep away from my horses Every man has his own ways. You are not afraid of staying here alone with the little lady ? ”

“ Afraid ? No, for I shall not see the Lady. By-the-by, can you tell me how it is known she is veiled, since no one has seen her ? ”

“ I do not know, sir It is an old story, and I am not the author of it I believe it without tormenting myself about it. I am not a coward, and, besides, I have done nothing to displease the spirit of the Castle ”

“ Well, good night, and may you sleep well,” said Flochardet , “ be here without fail at break of day , serve us well and promptly, and you will not repent it ”

Flochardet, left alone with Diane, approached her and touched her cheeks and her little hands He was surprised and glad to find them quite cool He tried to feel her pulse, although he did not know much of childish fevers Diane kissed him, saying, “ Be easy, darling father, I am so well , it is my doll who has the fever, do not disturb her ”

Diane was sweet and loving, she never complained. But she was looking so calm and so playful that her father could not help rejoicing. “ She had her access of fever, no doubt,” he thought ; “ she was wandering when she thought she heard the statue speak , but the attack was very short, and perhaps the change of air has helped to cure her. Convent life does not perhaps suit her. I will keep her with us, and my wife certainly will not be angry.”

Flochardet wrapped himself up as well as he could, stretched himself on the steps of the fountain by the

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side of his child, and was not long in falling asleep, like a young and healthy man as he was

Monsieur Flochardet was not yet forty years old. He was good looking, amiable, rich, well-educated, and a very worthy man. He had earned much money in making finished and expensive portraits, which ladies always thought good likenesses, because they were flattering and made them look younger. To tell the truth, all Flochardet's portraits resembled one another greatly. He had a very pretty type in his head, this he produced invariably with very slight modifications, he only applied himself to render faithfully the dress and style of dressing the hair of his models. The accuracy of these details constituted all the personality of the figures. He excelled in imitating the tint of a robe, the movement of a ringlet, the airiness of a ribbon, and there were some of his portraits that one recognised at once by the likeness of the cushion, or the parrot, placed by the side of the model. He was not without talent. Indeed, he had much of his own sort, but originality, genius, the feeling of real life, these are things which must not be expected of him. He had also an undoubted success, and the elegant wives of the townspeople preferred him to a great master who would have had the impertinence to reproduce a wart or to accuse them of a wrinkle.

After two years of marriage and widowhood, he had married a second time, a young person, poor but of good family, who thought him the greatest painter in the universe. She was not naturally silly, but she was so pretty that she had never found time to reflect or to improve herself. Also she recoiled before the task of educating her husband's daughter. That is

why she had placed her in a Convent, with the notion that being an only child, she would amuse herself better with little companions than alone at home. She would not have known how to play with Diane and amuse her, or if she had known, she would not have found the time to do so. It required a great deal of time to dress herself ten times a day, and to make herself each time more beautiful than before.

Flochardet was a good father, and a good husband. It is true he thought Madame Flochardet a little frivolous, but it was to please him that she decked herself out all day. It was also, she said, to be useful to him in putting him in the way of studying all the varieties of feminine apparel of which he used such a large part in his paintings. When falling asleep in the fountain of the old domain, Flochardet thought of these things, of the dresses and of the beauty of his wife, and of his sick child already perhaps cured, of his rich clients, of the works which he was longing to take up again, of the accident to the carriage, of the curious coincidence of the fanciful story of the postilion with little Diane's hallucination, of the Veiled Lady, and of the necessity that country people seem to feel in believing in the marvellous, without even fear being the cause of these marvels, and whilst ruminating over these varied impressions, he fell into a deep sleep, and even snored a little.

Diane also slept, did she not? Well, I confess that I cannot tell. I have told you of her father and her mother, and I have allowed myself this digression, because it is necessary for you to know why Diane was habitually a quiet and dreamy little girl. She had

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spent her early infancy alone with her nurse who adored her, but who talked very little, and she had been obliged to settle for herself as she could the ideas that came into her little head. You will not therefore be too much surprised at what I am going to tell you about her in the course of time. For the moment I must tell you how her spirit was awakened and how it pioneered through Pictordu Castle.

When she heard her papa snore, she opened her eyes and looked about her. It was dark in the great circular hall, but as the vaulted roof was not high and one of the carriage lamps, hooked on to the wall, still gave a wan and trembling light, Diane could distinguish one or two of the dancers, imitated from the antique, which were placed before her. The best preserved and at the same time the most damaged one was a tall person whose green robe had a certain freshness, whose unclad arms and legs were not wanting in drawing, but whose face, injured by the damp, had entirely disappeared.

Diane, while slumbering, had heard in a vague manner what the postilion had related to her father concerning the Veiled Lady, and by degrees she began to think that this body without a face must have some connection with the legend of the Castle.

"I do not know," she thought to herself, "why my papa treated it as nonsense. I am very sure that the Lady did speak to me on the terrace, and that her voice was very pretty and soft. I should be glad if she would speak to me again. And if I were not afraid of displeasing papa, who thinks I am still ill, I would go and see if she is still there."

Scarcely had she thought thus, when the lamp

went out and she saw a beautiful blue light like that of the moon cross the hall, and in this ray of soft light she saw that the dancer had left the wall and was coming to her. Do not think she was afraid of it ; it was an exquisite form Her dress made a thousand graceful folds on her beautiful figure, and seemed sewn with silver spangles A girdle of gems confined her light tunic , a veil of brilliant gauze was wound round her hair, which escaped in fair tresses over her snow-white shoulders Her features could not be discerned through the gauze, but two pale rays issued from her eyes. Her arms, uncovered to the shoulders, were of perfect moulding. In a word, the pale and uncertain nymph of the wall had become a living person most beautiful to look at.

She came quite close to the child, and without glancing at the father stretched beside her she leaned over Diane and impressed a kiss on her forehead ; that is to say, Diane heard the soft sound of her lips and felt nothing The child threw her arms round the neck of the Lady to return her caress, and to detain her, but had embraced only a shadow

“ You are made then only of mist, that I do not feel you ? At least speak to me that I may know that it is you who have already spoken to me ”

“ It is I,” said the Lady ; “ will you come out with me ? ”

“ I should like to, but take away my fever so that my father need not be anxious ”

“ Be easy, you will come to no harm with me. Give me your hand ”

The child gave her hand trustfully, and though she did not feel that of the fairy, it seemed as if a pleasant

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coolness passed through her whole being They went out together from the hall

"Where do you wish to go?" said the Lady

"Wherever you wish to take me," replied the little girl

"Would you like to return to the terrace?"

"The terrace seemed very pretty with its wild shrubs and tall grass full of sweet flowers"

"Do you not wish to see the inside of my Castle, which is still more beautiful?"

"It is all ruined and open to the air"

"In that you are deceived It seems so to those whom I do not allow to see it"

"Then will you let me see it?"

"Certainly Look!"

At once the ruins, in the midst of which Diane believed herself to be, were replaced by a beautiful gallery with golden ceilings in relief Between each great transept crystal lustres were lighted, and figures of black marble carrying torches stood erect in the recesses Other statues, some of bronze, some of white marble or of jasper, others entirely of gold, appeared on their richly sculptured pedestals, and a pavement of *mosaïque*, representing flowers and birds strangely arranged, were stretched as far as eye could reach under the feet of the little traveller At the same time sounds of distant music were heard, and Diane, who adored music, began to run and jump, impatient to see the dancing, for she did not doubt that the Fairy was taking her to a ball

"You like dancing then?" asked the Fairy

"No," she replied, "I have never learnt to dance, and I feel my legs are too weak, but I love



to see everything that is pretty, and I should like to see you dance in a ring as I saw you do in the painting ”

They came to a large room filled with brilliantly lighted mirrors, and the Fairy disappeared , but at the same moment Diane saw a number of persons resembling her, in green robes and gauze veils, who bounded lightly by hundreds in all the large mirrors to the sound of an unseen orchestra. She was much amused in watching this circle, until her eyes were tired and it seemed as if she slept. She felt herself awakened by the cool hand of the Fairy, and she found herself in another room still more beautiful and richly adorned, in the centre of which was a table of massive gold and of beautiful form, loaded with dainties, with rare fruits and flowers, with cakes and sweets, piled up to the ceiling.

“ Take what you like,” said the Fairy to Diane.

“ I want nothing,” she replied, “ unless it is a glass of quite cold water ; I feel as hot as if I had been dancing.”

The Fairy breathed on her through her veil, and she felt rested, and her thirst quenched.

“ Now you are well again, what will you see ? ”

“ All that you wish me to see.”

“ Have you no choice ? ”

“ Will you let me see the gods and goddesses ? ”

The Fairy did not seem surprised at this demand Diane had once had in her hands an old book of mythology with very ugly figures which at first had seemed very beautiful to her, but ended by aggravating her She longed to see something better, and thought that the Fairy must have some fine pictures. The latter led her into a hall where there were life-size

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paintings representing mythological persons Diane looked at them first with astonishment and then with the desire to see them move

"Make them come close to us," she said to the Fairy

Immediately all the divinities came out of their frames, began to walk round them, then to rise very high and whirl in a vortex to the ceiling like birds pursuing one another They moved so fast that Diane could no longer distinguish them She seemed to recognise some that she had liked in her book graceful Hebe with her cup, proud Juno with her peacock, Mercury with his little hat, and Flora with all her garlands, but all this movement again tired her

"It is too hot here," she said to the Fairy, "lead me into your garden"

At the same instant she found herself on the terrace, but it was no longer the wild and uncultivated place that she had crossed to enter the Castle It was a flower-garden with footpaths paved with *mosaïque* of little multicoloured pebbles, and beds where a thousand designs were traced with flowers, in imitation of a rich carpet The statues sang a beautiful song in honour of the moon, and Diane wished to see the goddess whose name she bore She appeared in the form of a silvery cloud in the heavens She was divinely tall and carried a shining bow At one moment she became smaller, and then so small you would have taken her for a swallow, as she approached she became tall again Diane grew tired of following her with her eyes and said to the Fairy "Now I should like to kiss you"

"That is to say, you are sleepy," said the Fairy,

taking her in her arms; "sleep then, but when you awake, forget nothing of that which I have shown to you "

Diane fell into a deep sleep, and when she awoke she found herself in the marble trough, holding her little doll's hand in her own. The blue dawn had taken the place of the blue moonlight. Monsieur Flochardet was up and had opened his portmanteau. He was quietly shaving, for in those times a man of the world, whatever the situation in which he found himself, would have blushed at not being shaved the first thing in the morning.

## CHAPTER III

### MADemoiselle de PICTORDU

**D**IANE rose, put on her shoes that she had taken off on going to sleep, fastened the hooks of her frock, and begged her papa to lend her the mirror that she might also do a little toilette whilst he went with Romaneche to arrange their departure. Flochardet, knowing her to be tidy and careful, left her alone, recommending her, if she went out, not to run any risks among the ruins of the Castle without looking well where she was going. Diane performed her toilette, packed everything nicely in the port-manteau, and, not seeing her father return, she wandered into the garden, hoping to find all the pretty things that she had seen with the Fairy in the night. But she could not even find the same places. The spiral staircases were broken, or their steps turned on their pivots without being able to rest on the sides of the falling-in towers. The superposed halls had fallen in one over the other, and it was impossible to make out the arrangement of the rooms. One could see that all the structures had been richly ornamented, certain sides of the walls preserved traces of painting, there was the remains of gilding on the broken marble, beautiful chimney-pieces still held to the walls, and stood erect in space, the ground was heaped with debris of all sorts, panes of coloured glass lay in fragments like sparks sown over the verdant

wild plants ; little marble hands, which had belonged to statues of Cupids, wings in bronze formerly gilded detached from some candelabra, pieces of tattered tapestry gnawed by rats, on which one could still see the pale figure of a Queen, or a vase filled with flowers in a word, a princely luxury in crumbs, a whole world of riches, and of pleasures fallen into dust.

Diane did not understand the utter desertion of so grand a castle, whose façade still rose so majestically by the side of the ravine.

“ It must,” thought she, “ be a dream that I see now They told me when I had the fever that I wandered a little I was quite clear last night, and I saw things as they must really be. Yet I do not feel ill, but the Fairy told me her Castle could only be seen when she permitted it, and I must be satisfied to see it as she shows it me now.”

After seeking in vain for the beautiful rooms, the grand galleries, the paintings and statues, the golden table loaded with bon-bons, all the marvels amongst which she had passed the night, Diane went into the garden and found there only nettles, briars, great white bouillons, and asphodels. I do not know what instinct persuaded her that these plants were not more ugly than others, and these flower-beds, despoiled of their symmetrical designs and of their coloured pebble-work of which she found some trace whilst searching for strawberries, pleased her such as they were.

She picked up some fragments of these *mosaïque* which she put into her pocket, and passing on to the edge of the terrace she searched in the dense mass of shrubs for the statue which had spoken to her the

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previous evening She found her standing by the side of the large vase, the arm stretched out towards the entrance of the Castle, but she no longer spoke How had she spoken ? She had no mouth, she had no face The back of the head only was left her, with the end of a piece of drapery in her marble tresses The other statues were still more mutilated by time, neglect, and the pebbles that foolish children had amused themselves by throwing at them An older person than Diane would have understood that these statues, standing in solitude, frightened the passers-by, and that rational people, regretting the havoc, had let the ignorant believe that the Castle was guarded by a lady without a face, who received the inoffensive and punished the guilty

Several accidents having happened below the terrace, where there was in fact a narrow and difficult passage between the high wall and the little river, belief in a guardian spirit of the ruins had spread, and no more harm was done , but the sad state of the other statues bore witness to the ill-treatment they had long had to submit to Each was wanting in an arm or two, some of which lay stretched among the purple thistles and the yellow toad-flax

In looking attentively at the statue which had spoken to her, Diane seemed to recognise the likeness of her kind Fairy, at the same time she also identified this figure with that of the dancer painted in the hall where she had slept She might well imagine what she liked in this respect , all the divinities of the Renaissance imitated from the antique have in form as well as in costume a family resemblance, and it having chanced that both these figures had lost their faces, little

Diane's idea, if not correct, was at least ingenious. Tired of walking, she tried to rejoin her father, and found him below the terrace, occupied in hurrying on the repairs of the carriage.

Romanèche had unearthed in the neighbourhood a sort of cartwright, a good and fairly skilful peasant, but who did not work very fast and was badly supplied with tools.

"You must have patience, my little lady," said Romanèche; "I have found you some brown bread which is not at all bad, and some fresh cream and strawberries. I have taken them all to your large room. If you will return there to breakfast, that will prevent your getting tired"

"I am not at all tired," replied Diane, "but I will go and eat something. I thank you for having thought of me."

"How do you feel this morning?" asked her father. "How have you slept?"

"I have not slept much, dear papa, but I could not have amused myself more."

"Amused in dreaming, you mean? You had gay dreams then? Well, that is a good sign! Go and get your breakfast!"

And watching her as she went, Flochardet admired the sweet nature of this small pale child who always found everything to her liking, never tormented anyone with her troubles, and showed a quiet little gaiety in every circumstance.

"I do not understand," he thought, "why my wife thought it necessary to send her away from home, where she made so little noise, and was so easily pleased. I know that my sister, the Abbess of the Visitandines,

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is very kind to her, but my wife ought to take still greater care of her ”

Diane returned to the hall, and as she knew how to read, she noticed an inscription half-effaced engraved above the door of the baths. She succeeded in deciphering and in reading “ Baths of Diana ”

“ Well ! ” she said, laughing, “ I am, then, in my own house ! I should much like to bathe here, but the water comes no longer, and I must be content to sleep and to breakfast here ”

She found the things that Romaneche had placed for her on the steps of the fountain, and very excellent they were. Having breakfasted she was desirous to draw. You will think she knew nothing of drawing, her father had never given her any lessons. He had contented himself with giving her pencils and paper as much as she liked for her childish scribbles in a corner of his studio, and at those times she tried to copy the portraits which she saw him make. He found her attempts very funny, and laughed heartily at them, but he did not think she had the slightest taste for drawing, and he was resolved not to torment her in order to make her follow his profession.

At the Convent where Diane had passed the last year they did not teach drawing. In those days an artistic education was not given except to those who had a livelihood to gain, and Flochardet, being rich, thought of making a real lady of his daughter, that is to say, a pretty young lady who would know how to chatter and how to dress herself, without racking her brain to be anything more. Nevertheless, Diane loved drawing passionately, and she had never met with a picture, a statue, or a painting without



examining it with great attention. In the Convent chapel there were several statuettes of saints, and some paintings which pleased her more or less. I do not know why, in looking at the frescoes in the baths of Diana at the Castle of Pictordu, and in recalling in a rather confused manner all that the Fairy had shown her in the night, she persuaded herself that the images of the Convent were worth nothing, and that she had now before her eyes something really beautiful.

She remembered that, when putting two albums into his trunk, her father had said to her : " This little one shall be for you if you have still a taste for scribbling on paper "

She searched for this album and took it, cut her pencil with her little pocket-knife, and began to copy the nymph with the green dress which the morning sun lit up with a fresh light ; and then she remarked that the figure was not dancing she passed majestically, marking the time perhaps with a soft step, but without stirring, for her two feet rested on the cloud which bore her, and her hands, clasping those of her sisters, did not pull them to hasten the movement of the circle " She is perhaps one of the Muses," thought Diane, who had not at all forgotten her mythology, although all these profane fables were proscribed at the Convent.

Whilst thus dreaming, Diane went on drawing, drawing. Dissatisfied with her first copy, she made a second, and then another, and another, until her album was half full. And when she had arrived so far, she was still not satisfied. She was going to continue, when a little hand was placed on her shoulder. Turning quickly Diane saw behind her a young girl of about

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ten years, pretty and well made, but not very well dressed, who looked at her drawing and said with a mocking air "You amuse yourself with drawing women in your books, do you?"

"Yes," replied Diane, "and you too?"

"I? Oh, never! My father forbids it, I do not spoil his books"

"My father gave me this one to amuse myself with," replied Diane

"Really? Then he is very rich?"

"Rich? Indeed, I do not know!"

"You do not know what it means to be rich?"

"Not very well I have never thought about it"

"Then that is because you are rich! As for me, I know very well what it is to be poor"

"If you are poor, I have nothing, but I will ask my papa"

"Ah! You take me for a beggar? You are not very polite! That is because I have only a cotton frock and you have a silk one Know then, that I am very much above you You are only a painter's daughter, and I am Mademoiselle Blanche de Pictordu, daughter of the Marquis de Pictordu"

"How do you know me then?" said Diane, who was very little dazzled by these distinctions which she did not at all understand

"I have just seen your papa in the court of my Castle, and he was talking with my father I know that you have passed the night here, your papa apologised for it to my father, who is a real lord, and has invited him to come to a better arranged house than this deserted Castle I tell you, because you are coming to dine with us at the new house"

“ I will go where my papa likes,” replied Diane ;  
“ but I should like to know why you say that this Castle  
is deserted. I think it is still very beautiful, and that  
you hardly know all that is in it.”

“ I know that there are snakes, bats, and nettles in  
it,” said Mademoiselle de Pictordu with a melancholy  
and disdainful air. “ You need not scoff I know  
that we have lost the fortune of our ancestors, and  
that we are forced to live like small country gentlemen  
But my papa has taught me that that does not lower  
us, for no one can prevent our being the only true  
Pictordus.”

Diane understood less and less of the ideas and lan-  
guage of this young lady. She asked her simply if she  
was the daughter of the Veiled Lady ? This question  
seemed to irritate the young lady of the Castle not a  
little

“ Understand,” she said drily, “ that the Veiled  
Lady does not exist, and it is only ignorant people  
and madmen who can believe in such folly. I am  
not the daughter of a Phantom , my mother came of  
as good a family as my father.”

Diane, feeling herself too ignorant to reply to her,  
did not return an answer , and her father came to  
tell her to prepare for departure. The carriage was  
repaired The Marquis de Pictordu insisted on the  
painter accepting his invitation to dinner. In  
those times they dined at midday. The new house  
of the Marquis was at the end of the ravine on the  
Saint-Jean-Gardonienque road. From time to time  
the Marquis came and walked among the ruins of  
the home of his ancestors, and on that day, being  
there by chance, he was very kind and hospitable to

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the travellers who had been detained there by an accident Flochardet suggested in a low voice to Diane that she should put on a fresh dress before he closed the trunks, but Diane, notwithstanding her simplicity, had a great deal of tact. She saw that Blanche de Pictordu was jealous of her simple travelling dress, she did not wish to increase her vexation by putting on a still prettier frock. She begged her father to let her remain as she was, and she even retired and slipped into her pocket a little turquoise clasp which fastened the black velvet passed round her neck.

When the carriage was reloaded, the Marquis and his daughter, who were on foot, got in with Diane and her father, and half an hour later they arrived at the new house.

It was a little farmhouse, with a pigeon-cot bearing the arms of the family, and containing a most modest apartment for the proprietor. The Marquis was an excellent man, but somewhat narrow minded, not well-informed though well bred, very hospitable and religious, and yet unable to resign himself to be one of the least of the country gentlemen of his province, he who by his birth flattered himself that he was above the eight great Barons of the Gevandum. He felt no bitterness against anyone, and thought it quite just that a painter should enrich himself by his work, he evinced much esteem for Flochardet, whom he had heard spoken of, and he gave him the best possible reception, but he could not forbear from excusing himself every moment for the want of luxury, adding that in this declining age the nobility without money no longer received any consideration.

Not that he was ill-tempered ; he was only bored and in want of diversion ; but he was wrong to be always talking of his position before his daughter. Little Blanche was born proud and envious ; her disposition was already soured, and it was a great pity, for she might have been a charming girl, and as happy as any other child, if she had only been contented with her fate. Her father was very kind to her, and after all, she only lacked superfluous luxuries.

The dinner was very simple and nicely served by a stout peasant-woman, who was Blanche's nurse and the sole servant of the house. Many things were talked of which did not interest Diane ; but when mention was made of the old Castle which, without daring to say so, she had left with keen regret, she opened her ears with all her might. Her father was saying to the Marquis :

" I am astonished, since you complain of some embarrassment of fortune, at the abandonment of the relics of art, which you might have turned to account "

" Are there then really still some artistic treasures in my Castle ? " asked the Marquis.

" There were most certainly before all the roofs fell in. I saw many remains which, had they been saved in time, might have been sent to Italy, where there still exists a taste for these antiquities

" Yes," replied the Marquis, " with some money I might have still saved something, I know, but I had no money. It would have been necessary to consult an artist, to have asked him to choose and value the things, and then the packing up and transporting the objects, a trustworthy traveller to accompany them. . . You see, I could not sell the things myself ! "

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“ But in the neighbourhood could you find no one who wished to possess some tapestries, or a few of the statues ? ”

“ No one The rich people of the present day despise antiquities They follow the fashion, and the fashion is for Chinese ornaments, rock-work, and powdered shepherdesses ! They no longer care for nymphs and muses They must have elaborate rich and over-ornamented things Is not that your opinion ? ”

“ I never speak evil of Fashion,” replied the painter, “ by my calling, I am its blind and devoted servant However, fashion changes, and it may be that a taste will revive for the old style of the Valois If you have saved some of the remains of the ornaments of your Castle, keep them—the time may come when they will have their value ”

“ I have saved nothing,” replied the Marquis “ When I came into the world, my father had already let everything perish, from vexation, as well as from pride Nothing would have induced him to sell a single stone of his Castle, and he would not quit it, until it seemed near falling upon his head More humble and submissive to the will of heaven, I came and lived at this little farm, sole property remaining to me of our immense estates ”

Diane tried to understand what she heard, and she thought she understood it, she had a tenderness of conscience She drew from her pocket a handful of the little pebbles of various colours which she had picked up on the terrace, and giving them to Monsieur Flochardet “ Papa,” she said to him, “ these are what I took from the Castle garden I thought they were

only like other pebbles, but since you say that Monsieur le Marquis was wrong to let all be lost, we must return him these things which are his, and of which I had no intention of robbing him."

The Marquis was touched with Diane's pretty simplicity, and replacing the *mosaïques* in the child's hand, he said: "Keep them in remembrance of us. I only regret, my dear little girl, that they are pieces of glass and fragments of marble without any value. I wish I had better to offer you."

Diane hesitated to take back the trifles that were offered so kindly to her. In hastily emptying everything out of her pocket, she had also drawn out of it her little turquoise buckle, and showed it to her father, at the same time glancing towards Mademoiselle Blanche, who was gazing at the jewel and seemed dying to touch it. Flochardet understood his daughter's kind intention, and presenting the clasp to Mademoiselle de Pictordu he said: "Diane begs you to accept in exchange for your pretty pebbles these little cut stones, in order that you may each have a remembrance of the other."

Blanche blushed to the tips of her ears. She was too proud to accept the gift simply, but the desire she felt to possess these pretty turquoises made her heart beat.

"You will grieve my daughter very much if you refuse," said Flochardet to her.

Blanche seized the jewel with a nervous movement, almost snatched it from the painter's hands, and ran out of the room without stopping to thank him, she was afraid that her father would order her to refuse it.

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Perhaps he would have done so if he had hoped to be obeyed, but knowing the character of the child, he did not wish his guests to witness a vexatious scene. He begged Flochardet to excuse the brusque manners of a little savage, and thanked him in her place.

Dinner being finished, Flochardet, who wished to travel during the rest of the day, took leave of the Marquis, inviting him if he came to the south to honour him with a visit.

The Marquis thanked him for the pleasant moments spent in his society, and shook hands at parting. Blanche, sent for by her father, came with a bad grace, and gave Diane a cold kiss. She had round her neck the turquoise clasp, and she held it with her hand as if she feared they would take it away again. Diane could not help thinking her very silly, but she forgave her for the sake of the kind Marquis who had had the baskets of their carriage filled with his best cakes and his finest fruit.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE LITTLE BACCHUS

THE rest of the journey was accomplished without accident. Diane had no return of fever, and she had almost regained her lost colour when Flochardet put her into her stepmother's arms saying, "I am bringing her back to you because she has been ill. I believe she is already cured, but we shall have to see first that the fever does not return."

Diane was so pleased to find herself with her parents again that she was wild with delight for some days. Madame Flochardet was also delighted to begin with, and was very much taken up with her. She seemed devoted to Diane, and made her a thousand little presents, and amused herself with her as if she were a pretty doll. Diane submitted to be curled, and dressed up, and showed no impatience at all the time which was devoted to her toilette, but without accounting for it, she felt very bored at spending so much time over her little person. She stifled her yawns, and became pale when she had to stand before a glass to try on hats and dresses. She did not know how to dress herself to her stepmother's taste, and when she tried to be more simple and to follow her own taste, she was scolded and treated roughly, as if she had committed a grave fault. She wished to do something else, and to learn something, whatever it might be. She asked a great many questions, but

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Madame Flochardet found her questions foolish, not to the purpose, and did not judge it necessary that she should evince curiosity on serious subjects. Diane was obliged to hide from her that she had a great desire to learn drawing. Madame Flochardet looked forward to the day when, her husband having made his fortune, there would no longer be any painting in the house, and she could set up for a fine lady.

Diane began to be seriously weary and to regret the Convent, which she did not love at all, but where at least the employment of her time was regulated for her. She became pale again, her step grew slower, and fever reappeared every alternate day towards sunset, and lasted till the morning.

Then Madame Flochardet became more anxious than there was any reason for, and tormented her to take a quantity of drugs by the advice of all the fine ladies who came to see her. The child continued submissive in everything, and wishing to reassure her parents, declared that there was nothing the matter, and she did not feel at all ill. Monsieur Flochardet, though he made less disturbance, felt still more anxious than did his wife. Having to devote the whole of his day to his work as a painter he remained all the evening by his daughter's bedside, and hearing her wandering he feared that she would lose her reason.

Happily he had for a friend a good doctor who understood things. He knew Madame Flochardet well, and observed her manner of dealing with the child. One day he said to Monsieur Flochardet, "Leave the little one alone, throw all those nostrums and pills into the fire, and only give her what I order

her, and do not go against her wishes, for all she has are reasonable. Do you not see that the idleness to which she is condemned for fear of making her ill makes her still more ill? She gets weary of it; let her find an occupation, and when she shows a marked preference for a subject, let her give herself up to it. Above all, do not make her a little manikin to have all those costumes tried on, it tires her and is not a pleasure. Let her figure and her hair both go free, and if Madame Flochardet suffers at seeing her thus, try to make her forget the child, and occupy herself with something else."

Monsieur Flochardet understood, and knowing that it was difficult to persuade Madame Laure, he took means of diverting her attention. He reassured her by informing her that there was nothing serious the matter with the child, and he induced her to resume her life of visiting, driving, dinners in the town, balls, and evening parties. He had not much trouble in determining her to do so. Diane became free, and her nurse, who had orders to accompany and take care of her, did not contradict her any more than in the past.

Then Diane asked and obtained leave to slip into her father's studio while he worked, and she appeared there again, always quiet and good in her little corner, looking sometimes at the canvas, then at the model, but no longer attempting her scribbles, and no longer causing laughter at her own expense. She knew now that painting was an art, and that it was necessary to study in order to know it.

Her desire to learn remained so keen that it became her fixed idea, but she no longer spoke of it, fearing

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that her father would tell her, as he had done formerly, that she had no gift for painting, and that her step-mother would oppose her wish. Monsieur Flochardet however, did not contradict her. Monsieur Feron, the old doctor, having advised him to observe her tendencies, he expected that she would show her old taste for portraits, and he put at her disposal a supply of pencils and paper. Diane did not avail herself of them, she only watched her father's cartoons and works, and went on dreaming.

She often thought of the Castle of Pictordu, and as the ruin where Monsieur Flochardet had been obliged to pass the night was sometimes spoken of before her, she dared no longer believe in all that the Veiled Lady had shown her. She regretted having seen it in a confused manner, caused perhaps by the fever, and she wished if it were a dream that she might have it again. But one does not dream of what one wishes, and the muse of Diana's baths did not come again and call her.

One day, when she was arranging her playthings—for she was very orderly—she found the little pebbles and fragments of *mosaïque* from the flower-beds of Pictordu. There was among the pebbles a ball of hard sand, the size of a walnut, which she had picked up to make a marble of. She tried for the first time to use it, but in throwing it she saw the sand detach itself and show a real ball in marble. Only this ball was not perfectly round, it was rather oval, and there were hollows and reliefs in it. Diane examined it, and discovered that it was a little head, the head of a statuette of a little child, and the face seemed so pretty that she did not tire of looking at it, turning it

over and over, putting it now in the sun, now in a half-shadow, imagining that she could constantly discover a new beauty in it

She was thus absorbed for half an hour, when the doctor, who had come in silently and was observing her, said in a friendly voice . “ What are you looking at there with so much pleasure, my little Diane ? ”

“ I do not know,” she replied, blushing , “ look at it yourself, my friend ; I fancy it must be the head of a little Cupid.”

“ It is more likely the head of a young Bacchus, for there are vine branches in his hair Where did you find this ? ”

“ Among the sand and pebbles at the old Castle, of which papa was speaking to you yesterday ”

“ Let me look at it ! ” the doctor went on, putting on his spectacles. “ Well ! This is very pretty this is an antique.”

“ That is to say, something which is not the fashion now. Mamma said that everything that is antique is very ugly.”

“ For my part,” said the doctor, “ I think just the opposite ; it is the new things that I find ugly.”

Monsieur Flochardet entered at this moment. He had finished a sitting of a portrait, and before beginning another he came to shake hands with the doctor, and to ask him how he found the little girl.

“ I find her very well,” replied Monsieur Féron, “ and more rational than you, for she admires this little fragment of antique statuary, and I lay a wager that you will not admire it.”

After having explained to him how it came into Diane’s hands, Flochardet looked at the head with

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indifference, and throwing it on the table said "It is not worse than other things of that time, if indeed it is an antique I do not pretend to be a judge like you, who have a mania for these remains, and think yourself an authority I do not deny your knowledge and erudition, dear doctor, but such rubbish is so worn out and so shapeless, that you often see with the eyes of faith I confess that I cannot do as much, and that all these so called works of art, whether Greek or Roman, have the same effect on me as Diane's dolls when they have their noses broken and their cheeks scratched"

"Profaner!" said the doctor in a rage, "you dare to make such a comparison! Ah! Well, you are a frivolous artist! You only understand laces and muffs, you do not know what is real life in art"

Flochardet was accustomed to the passionate sallies of the doctor He received them laughing, and his servant coming in to announce that the carriage of his client, the Marquise de Sept-Pointes, was entering the courtyard, he left the room still laughing

"You are naughty to day, my dear old friend," said Diane, scandalised at the doctor, "my papa is a great artist, all the world says so"

"That is why he ought not to talk such folly," replied the doctor, still very exasperated

"If he says what is not true, he says it to amuse himself"

"Apparently! Never mind that—but, now listen, Diane, you think this little head pretty, do you not?"

"Oh! very pretty, I love it!"

"Do you know why?"

"No."

"Try and tell me why."

"Because it is laughing, it is gay, it is like a real child."

"And yet it is the resemblance of a god."

"You said so. The god of the vintage."

"Then it is not a child like other children. The maker of it thought that this child should be prouder and stronger than the firstborn. Look at the way the head is put on, the strength and elegance of the neck, the hair a little wild over a low broad forehead, noble notwithstanding. But I am saying too much; you cannot understand it yet."

"Please tell me all, my friend, perhaps I shall be able to understand!"

"It does not weary you to listen?"

"On the contrary it rests me."

"Well, understand then that the Greek artists had a feeling for what is great, and they put it in the smallest things. You do not remember having seen my little collection of statuettes?"

"Indeed, I remember it very well, also the fine collections which are in the town; but no one has ever explained anything to me."

"You will come and pass a morning with me, and I will make you understand how with the most simple means and forms hardly indicated, those artists always achieved the grand and the beautiful. You will see also Roman busts of a more recent epoch. Grand artists too, those Romans! Less noble, less pure, than the Greeks, but always true, and feeling life in that which is really life."

"I do not understand now!" said Diane, sighing,

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"and I want so much to know what you mean by life ! "

"It is very simple Your frock, your shoes, your comb, are those living things ? "

"Oh, no ! " cried Diane

"My expression, my smile, this big wrinkle on my forehead, are they dead things ? "

"Certainly not ! "

"Well, when you see a person in a picture or a statue whose face does not live, you may be sure it is no better than the face of your doll, and that all the details of the dress or jewels do not make him living You hold in your hand there only a head without a body and much worn away by friction Still it lives, because he who carved it in this little bit of marble had the wish and the knowledge to make it live , do you understand now ? "

"I think I do a little , but tell me again "

"No, you have had enough for to day We will talk about it again another time , do not lose "

"My little head ? Oh, there is no danger of that ! I love it too much It comes to me from one whom I shall never forget ! "

"Who then ? "

"The lady who the lady that but I cannot tell you that ! "

"You have secrets then ? "

"Well, yes ! I do not want to tell ! "

"Not to me, your old friend ? "

"You will laugh at me "

"I assure you I will not "

"But you will say it was the fever "

"And if I do say so ? "



“That will pain me very much.”

“Then, I will not say so. Now tell me all about it.”

Diane recounted all her vision and all her enchantments at the Castle of Pictordu, and the doctor listened without laughing, without appearing to doubt her. He even helped her, by his questions, to recall it all, and to make herself clearly understood. For him it was an interesting study of the phenomena of the fever in the imagination of a child with a strong tendency to the poetical, consequently to the marvellous. He did not think it necessary to undeceive her. He left her, as he found her, in doubt. He would not confirm that what she had seen and heard was true and real. He seemed as if he did not know any more than herself if she had been dreaming or no, and the uncertainty in which he left her was a joy for her. When leaving her he said to himself. “We do not know the harm we do to children in laughing at their fancies, and the evil that we can do them by repressing their faculties. This child is a born artist, and her father does not suspect it. May Heaven preserve her from his lessons. He will pervert her feelings and disgust her with art.”

Happily for Diane, her excellent father had not taken it into his head to make her work, and seeing that she was delicate, he was resolved not to contradict her in anything. She spent more than one morning with the doctor, she looked again and again at his antiques, his busts, his statuettes, his medals, his cameos, and his engravings. He was an earnest amateur and a good critic, although he had never attempted to touch a pencil; he made her understand, and this was all that was wanting to give Diane the

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desire of copying what she saw. She drew then a great deal at his house while he was paying his visits.

I should deceive you, dear children, if I told you that she drew well. She was too young, and too much left to herself, but she had already acquired one great thing, that is, she understood her drawings were worth nothing. Formerly she was satisfied with all that appeared at the end of her pencil. In her imagination and in her ignorance she saw charming people in the place of the baboons which she had just drawn, and when she had made a circle with four strokes underneath, she persuaded herself that she had drawn a sheep or a horse. These easy illusions being dissipated, each time that she had made a sketch, and the doctor said, "Oh—ho, that is not bad!" she used to say to herself "No, it is bad, I can see quite well it is bad."

She believed for some time that the fever prevented her seeing well, and she kept begging her kind friend to cure her. He succeeded by degrees, and then feeling herself stronger and merrier, she no longer felt in such haste to know how to draw. She forgot her pencils, and passed her time in walking in the garden or out into the country with her nurse, amusing herself with everything, gaining strength, and sleeping soundly at night.

## CHAPTER V

### THE LOST FACE

THEY left the town in the month of May and went into the country. Diane was delighted.

One day, when she was gathering violets at the border of a little wood which was between her father's garden and that of a neighbouring lady, she heard talking close by her, and looking through the branches, she saw her stepmother, who was paying a visit to this lady, and was dressed in pretty soft muslin over a dress of pink taffeta. Her neighbour was clad more sensibly for walking in the woods, where Madame Flochardet had found her. They were both seated on a bench. Diane was advancing to greet them, when she stopped, intimidated. She was not unsociable, but Madame Flochardet had become so cold and indifferent towards her that she no longer knew if she gave her pleasure by approaching her. So she kept away, uncertain and saddened, and went on with her violet-gathering, not wishing to run away, and waiting until she was called.

As she was stooping behind the thicket, the ladies no longer saw her, and Diane heard her stepmother saying to her friend. "I thought she was coming to make her curtsey to you, but she has hidden herself to escape it. The poor child is so badly brought up, since they forbade me to superintend her education! Will you believe it, my dear? Her father is weak,

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and is quite governed by that Dr Feron, who is a bearish oddity, he has decreed that the child should not receive any education. Now you see the fine result!"

"That is a pity," said the other lady, "she is pretty, and has gentle manners. I often see her round my garden, she never touches my fruit or flowers, and she bows politely when she sees me. If she were a little better dressed, she would be quite good-looking."

"Ah yes, indeed! Well dressed! My dear, will you believe it, the old doctor forbids her wearing any stays! Not a whalebone about her! How can I prevent her becoming hunch backed?"

"She is not hunch-backed. On the contrary, she is very well made, but one might dress her without tightening her too much, and she might be allowed a little trimming on her skirts."

"Pshaw! She will not have it. The child detests being dressed properly, she takes after her mother, who was a very ordinary person, and more occupied in looking after her kitchen than in trying to have good manners and a good style."

"I knew her mother," replied the lady, "she was a sensible woman, a wise person, and very distinguished, I assure you."

"Really? Is it possible? I only talk from hearsay. Monsieur Flochardet has her portrait hidden somewhere, but he has never shown it to me. He does not like my talking about her, and after all, it is all the same to me. Let them bring up the child as they like, since it has nothing to do with me! I could have liked her, however, if they had allowed me to make her tractable—but"

"She is, then, sulky and disagreeable?"

"No, my dear, she is worse than that; she is silly, absent-minded, and I think rather idiotic."

"Poor child! Do they not teach her anything?"

"Nothing at all! She does not even know how to tie a ribbon, nor how to put a flower into her hair"

"I thought she liked drawing?"

"Yes, she likes it, but her father says she has no taste, and understands nothing about painting; but, as she understands nothing of all the rest"

Diane heard no more. She had put her hands to her ears, and had gone to the farthest end of the wood to hide her tears. She felt very great sorrow without exactly knowing why. Was it the humiliation of being thought so stupid? Or the discouragement of being judged incapable by her father? Was it not rather the sorrow of discovering that she was not loved?

"My papa loves me still, I am sure of it," she said to herself; "if he finds me stupid and awkward it is possible, but he does not love me the less. It is Mamma Laure who despises me, and does not care about me."

Up to this time, Diane had done her best to love Madame Flochardet. Now she felt she was nothing to her, and for the first time she thought of her mother, and made great efforts to remember her; but this was naturally impossible; she was still in her cradle when she lost her mother before she could remember anything. She remembered very vaguely the marriage of her father with Madame Laure; only she noticed her nurse's sadness that day. She remembered having

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heard her say several times when looking at her  
“Poor child ! What a misfortune for her !”

Madame Laure had embraced Diane and stuffed her with sugar-plums, and the child had paid no further attention to the grief of her nurse. She began to understand it on hearing her stepmother's harsh words about her and about that dead mother of whom no one had ever spoken to her, and of whom she now began to think with an ardour and a grief quite new in her little life. It was as if she had made a new discovery in herself of a feeling which had been slumbering in the bottom of her heart. She threw herself on the grass, repeating with a voice broken by her sobs “Mamma ! Mamma !” Then she heard herself called between the branches of lilac blossom by a soft voice, which said “Diane, my dear Diane, my child, where are you ?”

“Here, here, I am here !” cried Diane, running wildly

The voice called her again, sometimes on one side, now on the other. She sprang forward to follow it, till she came to the banks of a large river without knowing in what country she found herself. She stepped into the water, and found herself seated on a dolphin, which had eyes of silver and fins of gold. She no longer thought of her mother. She saw mermaids gathering flowers in the very middle of the river.

Then all at once she found herself on the summit of a mountain, where a tall snow statue said “I am your mother, come and kiss me !”

And she could not stir, for she had become a snow statue too, and she broke in two and rolled to the

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bottom of a ravine, where she saw again the Castle of Pictordu and the Veiled Lady, who made a sign for her to follow her. She tried to cry "Let me see my mother!" but the Veiled Lady became a cloud, and Diane awoke, feeling a kiss on her forehead.

It was her nurse, kind Geoffrette, who lifted her up saying · "I have been looking for you the last quarter of an hour, you must not sleep like this on the ground, the grass is still damp Here is your luncheon which I went to fetch for you. Get up now, or you will catch cold! Come this way and eat it in the sun."

Diane was not hungry; she was quite upset by her dream, which was confused in her mind with what had passed before; it was some moments before she came to herself

"Nanny," she said, "where is Mamma? Not my present Mamma, no, no! Not Madame Laure; my real Mamma the one I had before!"

"Goodness me!" said Geoffrette, surprised; "she is in Heaven, you know that well enough!"

"Yes, you have always said so! But where is Heaven? How can one get there?"

"By goodness, my child, by kindness and by patience," replied Geoffrette, who had plenty of sound sense, though she spoke little, and never without necessity.

Diane lowered her head, and reflected.

"I know," she said, "that I am a child and that I am not sensible"

"Yes, indeed! You are quite good enough for your age!"

"But, at my age, one is foolish and tiresome to others, is it not so?"

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"Why do you say that? Am I ever tired of you? Your father cherishes you fondly, and the doctor loves you"

"But, Madame Laure?"

And as Geoffrette, who never said what was untrue, did not reply, Diane added "Oh, I know very well, she does not love me Tell me if my mother loved me"

"Without doubt she loved you with all her heart, although you were only a little child"

"And now, if she were to see me, would she love me less, or more?"

"Mothers love their children always the same, at all ages"

"Then it is a misfortune for me to have no longer a mother?"

"It is a misfortune which you must make amends for yourself, by being as good and wise as if she saw you"

"But she does not see me?"

"Ah, I do not say that I know nothing about it, but I cannot say that she does not see you"

This was a reply that suited Diane, who had the imagination of a loving heart She embraced her nurse, and asked a thousand questions about her mother

"My child," said Geoffrette, "you ask me too much, I only knew your mother a short time To me she was what was most beautiful and best in all the world, I wept much for her, and I still weep when I think of her Do not talk too much to me about her, if you do not wish to grieve me"

She replied in this way in order to calm Diane, whom she saw was very excited She succeeded in distracting her attention, but that evening the

child had a slight return of fever, and all night she had confusing and exhausting dreams. In the morning she grew calm, she opened her eyes and saw day was beginning to dawn through the blue curtains. Her room seemed quite blue, and she could distinguish nothing clearly. By degrees she saw more clearly a person standing at the foot of her bed.

"Is that you, Nanny?" she said, but the person did not reply, and Diane heard Geoffrette cough a little in her bed. Who then was this person who seemed to watch over Diane?

"Is it you, Mamma Laure?" said she, forgetting her harsh words, and only asking to be loved by her again.

The figure still did not reply, and Diane perceived that she had a veil over her face.

"Ah!" said she joyfully, "I know you again! You are my good Fairy! At last you have come back to me! Are you come to be my mamma?"

"Yes," replied the Veiled Lady, with her beautiful voice resounding like crystal.

"And you will love me?"

"Yes, if you love me."

"Oh, indeed, I wish to love you!"

"Will you come and walk with me?"

"Certainly, at once, but I am weak."

"I will carry you."

"Yes, yes! Let us go!"

"What do you wish to see?"

"My mother!"

"Your mother I am she."

"Is it true? Oh then, take off your veil, that I may see your face!"

## THE CASTLE OF PICTORDU

"You know well that I have no face "

"Then shall I never see it ? "

"That depends on yourself , you will see it the day that you give it back to me "

"Oh, tell me what that means, and how can I do it ? "

"You must find it Come with me, and I will teach you many things "

The Veiled Lady took Diane in her arms and carried her away—I cannot tell you where—Diane could never remember It appeared that she saw many beautiful things, for when Geoffrette came to wake her, she pushed her away with her hand and turned herself to the wall in order to sleep and dream again, but her dream was changed The Veiled Lady had taken the face and the dress of the doctor, who said to her "What does it matter to me if Madame Laure loves you or not ? We have other fish to fry without troubling ourselves about her ! "

Then Diane dreamed that her bed was covered with pictures, each more beautiful than the other, and each time that she looked at the face of a goddess or a muse she said "Ah ! Here is my mother, I am sure of it ! "

But at once the face changed, and she could not find the one she thought she had recognised

Towards nine o'clock the doctor, whom Geoffrette had sent for, came in to see Diane with her father The child was without fever, the attack had passed off They took care of her during the day, and the following night she was very calm Two days after she recovered again, and by the doctor's orders she returned to her life of freedom and running about

## CHAPTER VI

### THE FACE SOUGHT FOR

ONE fine day in that year the doctor, who observed everything, perceived a change in the family. Madame Laure could not conceal her desire to see Diane sent back to the Convent. It was not that she detested her, or that Madame Laure was wicked. She was vain, and she only accused Diane of being foolish, because she was foolish herself. She was hurt at not being able to manage her, humiliated at not having this plaything at her disposal. She talked to her husband without ceasing of the inactive life the child led, she seemed to think that Diane would be better employed if she made her lead the dissipated and perfectly useless life she herself led. Flochardet did not know what to think, he was divided between his wife's nagging and the doctor's advice. He looked at his daughter with doubt and anxiety, asking himself if she had an intelligence beyond her age, as Monsieur Féron maintained, or if she was wild and uncultivated as Madame Laure insinuated, if, in fact, it would not be better to confide her once more to the care of his sister, the nun at Mende.

On her side, Diane, pacified by the wise words of Geoffrette, by her return to good health, and by her good nature which bore no malice, did not appear to be fretted by the sharp and dry reproaches which

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her stepmother cast at her, but she no longer loved her, and no longer tried to make herself loved by her. Her stepmother had become indifferent to her—she was dreaming of other things.

The desire to improve herself again began to torment her, and it was not only drawing which she wished to learn, it was history, of which the doctor's instruction on art had given her a glimpse, and had shown her its interest and importance. She made herself anxious about the how and the why of the things of the world.

"It is too soon," said the doctor, "you are too happy at your age to understand annyting of human follies."

But as it is impossible to make history of an art, whatever it may be, without touching on the causes of its decay and its progress—the like may be said of the whole history of the human race—the doctor let himself be led on to instruct her truly.

She listened to him with so much eagerness that he regretted not being able to teach her entirely, all the more that at home Diane received no serious ideas at all. Flochardet talked indeed of giving her a governess, but it was easy to foresee that no governess would seem bearable to Madame Laure.

Then the doctor made a strong resolve. "I want you to give me your child and her nurse," he said to the artist.

"Are you joking?" cried Flochardet, "give you my child?"

"Yes, give her to me without her leaving you, since we live next door to one another in town as in the country. She shall spend the nights at your house if you like, but she will be with me from morning

till evening, and I will teach her and look after her myself in my own way."

"But you will not have the time!" said Flochardet.

"I will have the time! I am old and rich enough; I have the right to take life easy, and pass on my practice to my nephew, who has just finished his studies and is no fool. I have brought him up as my son, but I have always wished to have a daughter and to divide my fortunes between two children of different sexes. Come, is it settled?"

The doctor's last argument was very strong; Flochardet did not think he had the right to refuse such a brilliant future for his daughter, more especially as at the rate that Madame Laure was living he was fearful lest his own fortune should be wasted before long. Already to satisfy her luxurious tastes he had contracted debts which he dared not acknowledge. He yielded, and Madame Laure was very pleased. She even found it much more convenient that the little girl should live altogether with Geoffrette at the doctor's house. Flochardet again yielded, and Diane was installed in a charming little room nicely arranged for her with Geoffrette close by. The doctor kept his word, he gave up the active part of his practice, being considered a great physician, he could not refuse to devote two hours every day for consultations, during the playtime of his pupil, and Diane passed these two hours at her father's house. In the evening Monsieur Marcelin, nephew and successor to Monsieur Féron, came to submit to him any serious or interesting cases, respectfully taking his advice. Then, when he had time, he played and chatted with Diane, whom he treated as a little sister, for Marcelin was a fine young

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man, incapable of being jealous of her and feeling himself sufficiently enriched by the education, knowledge, and the practice which he owed to his uncle. An heir of this kind, my children, is a marvel, but although there may not be many such, there are some, and I know them.

Diane became very happy, studious, and healthy. She seemed to have forgotten her passion for drawing. One would have said that, notwithstanding her youth, she had understood that everything depends on the intelligence and that to know only one thing is to know nothing at all.

When Diane had grown a tall girl of twelve years old, she was still a charming child, simple, gay, kind to all the world, never putting herself forward, and yet she was very solidly taught for her age, and her mind had its unexpectedly serious side. She painted very nicely, having learned a little manual dexterity in watching her father work. But she showed her paintings to no one, because once the doctor had said it was very good, and Monsieur Flochardet had replied it was very bad. Diane felt that the doctor, who had great critical faculty, understood nothing of the actual execution. He had developed in her the love of the beautiful, but he could not give her the means of seizing it. She also felt that her father's system was quite opposed to the theories of the doctor, and that he never judged well of what was outside his own style, and that he could be unjust without knowing it.

But could Diane herself know it? This is what she asked herself with anxiety. What ought she to think of her father's talent, which the doctor criticised with so much apparent justice? Or what must she think of



the criticisms of the doctor, who could not hold a pencil or trace a line ?

This problem tormented her so greatly that she became ill from it. She had grown much, without being too thin and delicate. The doctor took care of her without being anxious about her, but he sought to discover the moral cause which brought on these little attacks of fever. As she did not wish to be seen working, she rose before daylight, and her nurse, who observed her, saw her become first red and as if mad with joy while drawing, then pale and as if discouraged, with her eyes full of tears

The doctor resolved to make his dear adopted daughter confess, and though she would willingly have been silent, she could not resist his tender questions.

“ Well, then,” she said to him, “ I acknowledge it , I have a fixed idea. I am seeking a face, and I cannot find it.”

“ What face ? Still that of the Veiled Lady ? Is that childish fancy returned to the tall sensible girl that I see before me ? ”

“ Alas, my dear friend, this fancy has never left me, since the Veiled Lady said to me ‘ I am thy mother, and thou shalt see my face when thou hast given it back to me ’ I did not understand at once , but little by little I have discovered that I must find and draw a face I have never seen, that of my mother, and it is that which I seek They told me she was so beautiful ! Perhaps it will be impossible for me to do something approaching it, unless I have a great deal of talent, and I want to have it, but it will not come ! I am dissatisfied with myself , I tear up, or scribble over everything , all my faces are ugly or

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insignificant I notice how my father embellishes his models, for it is certain that he does embellish them, I see it very well now, and I know that his success comes from that Well! This is what happens to me! When I look at them, these models are certainly not all handsome, there are some faded ladies, and very ugly gentlemen who come to him to be painted, and yet I think them less ugly—how shall I say it? More acceptable than the conventional faces that my father gives them Their faces are themselves, and it is just that, that my father thinks he must take from them—and they are content that he should take their character away In my head, I paint them as they are, and I see well that if I knew how to paint, I should do just the contrary to what papa does It is this which torments and grieves me, for he has certainly talent and I have none”

“He has talent and you have none, that is certain,” replied the doctor, “but you will have it, you are too anxious for it not to come to you, and when you have it—I do not say that you will have more than he, I know nothing about it—it will be another sort of talent, for you see with other eyes He can then teach you nothing, it is for you to find it alone, and it will take time You wish to go too fast, that is the way you risk having no talent at all, you get the fever, and one can do nothing that is worth doing when one is not well in health As for the face you are seeking, it is easy to let you know it, and that ought to chase away the Veiled Lady who besets you Your father possesses a very good miniature of your mother which resembles her strongly, he did not paint it himself,

and he does not like it, because it is contrary to his style. He shows it to no one, and pretends it is not her at all. I maintain that it is her entirely, and I can ask him for the miniature in order to show it to you."

At this moment Diane felt only the desire to know the features of her mother, she thanked the doctor warmly, and accepted his offer with a heartfelt joy. Monsieur Féron promised her that she should have the miniature before her eyes the next day. He made her promise to keep calm until then, and that she would work henceforth with less fire and with more patience.

"You need ten more years," he said to her, "before you know well what you are doing. You must see the chief works of the great Masters. We will travel when you are old enough to profit by it, and then you will be able to take lessons from some good painter, for here, under your father's eyes, it would be tactless, he is thought the first artist in the world, and he would perhaps be hurt to see you under another professor than himself."

"Oh! That is impossible, I understand quite well," cried Diane. "I will be patient, my good friend, I will be reasonable, I promise you."

She kept her word as much as possible. But as soon as she was asleep, she saw again the Veiled Lady, who proposed to her a walk in the Castle of Pictordu. They were hardly there when a tall young lady, slight and very pretty, came and begged them to go as fast as possible, for the Castle was going to fall. Diane recognised this girl to be none other than Mademoiselle Blanche de Pictordu, and as she called her by name

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she replied "It is not difficult for you to recognise me, for you see round my neck the turquoise clasp that you gave me, without that you would not know who I am, for you have no memory, and you are too unskilful to have drawn my face. Get away from here. The Castle is tottering and groaning, it yawns and complains, it is tired of resisting the storms that assail it, and all is going to fall down."

Diane was frightened, but the Veiled Lady kept away Blanche with her uplifted hand, and entering the archway made a sign to Diane to follow her. Diane obeyed, and the Castle fell, it fell upon them without doing them any more harm than if it had been a snow-storm, and the soil became strewn with cameos, each more beautiful than the other as they fell from the clouds.

"Quick," said the Veiled Lady, "let us look for my face! It must be found there, it is for you to recognise it. If you do not discover it, so much the sadder for you, you will never know me."

Diane searched for a long time, picking up stones which were engraved, some hollowed out of hard stone, others in relief or shells. Here, one represented in full length an extremely elegant figure, there another with a charming or severe profile, some were grinning like antique masks, the most part bore an austere or melancholy expression, and all showed an exquisite workmanship which Diane could not help admiring. But the Fairy was urgent. "Quickly, then," she said, "do not amuse yourself with looking at all those people, it is I, I alone, whom you must find."

Thereupon Diane found under her hand a trans

parent cornelian, in the heart of which was carved in dead white a profile of ideal beauty, the hair thrown back and fastened by a ribbon, and a star on the forehead. At first this little head appeared about the size of the seal of a ring, but as she looked at it, it seemed to grow, and at last filled up all the hollow of her hand.

“At last!” cried the Fairy, “behold me! It is indeed I, thy muse, thy mother, and thou shalt see that thou art not mistaken!” and she began to unknot her veil which was tied behind but Diane could not see her face, for the vision vanished, and she awoke in despair.

However, the impression had been so life-like and striking that she could not all at once recover her wits, and she squeezed her hand tight, thinking she could feel the precious cameo, which at least would preserve to her the precious picture so ardently sought for.

Alas! This illusion only lasted an instant, it was in vain to tighten her hand and to open it immediately, there was nothing in it, absolutely nothing

When she was dressed the doctor entered the room carrying a morocco box with gold clasps which he was going to open, thinking to cause her a joyful surprise, but pushing him back she cried. “No, no, my good friend! I ought not to see it yet! She does not wish it I must find her quite by myself, I must indeed, if not, she will leave me for ever!”

“As you like,” replied the doctor; “you have your own ideas which I do not always understand, but which I do not wish to oppose. I will leave this medallion with you, it is yours, your father gives it you, you will look at it when the Fairy who speaks to you in

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your dreams gives you permission, or when you no longer believe in furies, which will soon happen, for you are already of an age when you can distinguish dreams from reality, and I am not afraid of your losing your reason

Diane thanked Monsieur Teron for his kind words and for the beautiful present he had obtained for her. She kissed the medallion, and without opening it, locked it carefully in her little desk, after having solemnly vowed to herself that she would wait for the permission of the mysterious Muse, and she kept her word. She resisted the wish to know this cherished face, and she set to work to find it with the point of her pencil. But she also kept her word with her old friend, she worked with more patience, no longer wishing to succeed at once, and applying herself to copy casts, without hoping to achieve the creation of something fine from one day to the next.

A strange idea which helped her to be patient was that she thought she could recall perfectly the beautiful profile that she had seen and touched in her dream. It was always before her eyes, and always the same, every time that she thought of it, she forbade herself to think of it too long and too often, for if she did she seemed to see it tremble and threaten to disappear.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FACE FOUND

SHE continued to teach herself and to be very happy, when one day she was then about fifteen years old she found her father sad and changed.

"Are you ill, darling papa?" she said, embracing him; "your face does not look the same as it used to"

"Bah!" replied Flochardet a little roughly, "what do you know about faces, I should like to know."

"I try, papa, I do what I can," replied Diane, who saw in her father's words a mockery of her unhappy passion for art.

"You do what you can?" said Monsieur Flochardet, examining her sadly; "why have you taken into your head this mad idea of being an artist? You do not want that, you who have found a second father wiser and happier than the first, you wish to know the cares of work when it is not necessary! Why so? What is the good of it?"

"I cannot answer you, dear papa. It is in spite of myself, still, if it vexes you to see me try, I will give it up, whatever grief it will cause me."

"No, no, amuse yourself, do what you wish, dream over the impossible, that is the happiness of youth. Later on you will know that it is not talent that saves one from fatality and misfortune!"

"Dear father! You are unhappy?" cried Diane, throwing herself into his arms "Is it possible?"

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How ? Why ? You must tell me , I do not wish to be happy any longer, if you are not happy ”

“ Fear nothing,” replied Flochardet, embracing her with tenderness , “ I only said that to try you , I have no grief I thought you no longer loved me because—because I have neglected your education and confided it to another You have thought perhaps that I was a frivolous father, indifferent, led like a child ”

“ No, no, dear father , I adore you I have never thought of such a thing, why should I, indeed ? ”

“ Because I have often thought it myself , I have reproached myself with certain things , now I console myself in thinking that if any disaster or change of fortune happened to me, you would not suffer from it ”

Diane tried again to question her father , he changed the conversation and returned to his work , but he was agitated, impatient, and as if disgusted with what he was doing All at once he threw away his brush in a passion, saying “ It won't do to day, I shall spoil my canvas, and indeed I would cut it to pieces for a little ! Come and take a walk with me ”

As they were preparing to go out, Madame Laure entered, as smart as usual, but her face was also altered

“ What,” said she to her husband, “ you are going out, and yet you have to send home that portrait this evening ? ”

“ And if I do not send it home until to-morrow, what then ? ” said Flochardet drily, “ am I the slave of my clients ? ”

“ No But—you must receive the price of that



painting this evening, because to-morrow morning  
”

“Ah! yes, your dressmaker, your milliner, they have come to an end of their patience, I know it, and if they are not satisfied, that will be a new scandal.”

Diane, astonished and as if afraid, opened her eyes wide, which drew Madame Laure’s attention to her.

“My dear child,” she said, “you disturb your father too often, you prevent him from working, and to-day especially he must work. Leave him alone.”

“You send me away from my own home?” cried Diane, stupefied and in consternation.

“No,” said Monsieur Flochardet with energy, making her sit down by him. “Never! Stay! You never disturb me!”

“Then it is I who am the intruder,” replied Madame Laure. “I understand, and I know what remains for me to do.”

“Do whatever you please,” returned Flochardet in an icy tone

She left the room, and Diane burst into tears.

“What is the matter?” asked her father, trying to smile. “What does it matter to you if I quarrel now and then with Mamma Laure? She is not your mother, and you do not love her madly?”

“You are unhappy,” replied Diane, sobbing, “my father is unhappy, and I did not know it!”

“No,” said he, returning to his habitual airy manner; “one is not unhappy because one has annoyances. I have plenty of vexation, I allow, but I shall soon get rid of them. I will work more, that is all. I thought I had arrived at a time when I might take my rest; I have made a nice little fortune of about 200,000

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francs, which in the country is an easy competence, but I may as well tell you, for you will learn it one day or another, we have been living at too great a rate. I was imprudent enough to build a new house, the estimates were terribly surpassed, in short, I must sell again and at a loss, for the creditors are urgent. I will sell what I have, and my debts will be paid, my honour will be safe, do not be afraid, you will not have to blush for your father! Besides, I will retrieve it all, I am still young and strong, I will charge more highly for my portraits, my clients must be made to consent to it. With time I hope still to lay by something with which to endow you creditably, if you are not in too great a hurry to be married—in which case the doctor must advance your fortune.”

“Oh, do not talk of me,” cried Diane, “I have never thought of being married, and I never think of what may happen to me in the future. Let us talk only of you, dear father, must this pretty town house that you are so fond of, that you have furnished so well, and where you are so comfortable, really be sold? No! It is impossible! Where can you work? And your country house too—where will you live?”

Flochardet, seeing that Diane was feeling for him more deeply than he had intended, forced himself to reassure her by saying that perhaps he could after all obtain a delay. But she was anxious about the excess of work he was taxing himself with—she feared he would get ill.

She pretended to be reassured, but it was in order to please him, and she returned quite cast down, and passed the evening in crying over it. She dared not tell the doctor how much she was grieved, she feared

to hear him blame and criticise her father. She played at chess with her old friend, and retired to her room in order to cry at liberty.

She slept but little and did not dream. In the morning she went to work as on other days, seeking distraction, but always coming back to the cruel thought that Madame Laure would make her father work himself to death, and that if her own poor mother had lived, Flochardet would have always been wise and happy

Then she mourned in her heart for her mother, not as at first when grieving she had thought only of herself, now she regretted her for the happiness that she might have given to her father, and that she had carried away with her. And she went on drawing mechanically, without thinking of the occupation of her hands, she called on her mother from the depths of her soul, saying "Where art thou, oh, my mother? Dost thou see and know all that is passing? Canst thou not tell me what must be done to save and console him, whom another overwhelms and grieves?"

All at once she felt a warm breath in her hair, and a faint voice like the breeze of morning murmured in her ear "I am here, thou hast found me, my child."

Diane started and turned round, there was no one behind her. There was no other movement in her room than the shadows of the leaves of the lime-tree, moved by the wind cast on the deal floor. She looked at her paper, a delicate profile was sketched out, it was she who had traced it, she marked it out more strongly, and modelled the face still without attaching much importance to her work. Then she massed the hair of this head, drew a band around it with a star,

## THE CASTLE OF PICTORDU

in remembrance of the splendid cameo of which she had so often dreamed, and looked at it with indifference whilst Geoffrette, who had just come in, trotted about the room arranging various objects

"Well, my child," said the good woman, coming near, "are you satisfied with your work this morning?"

"Not more than on other days, dear Geoffrette, I hardly know indeed what I have been doing—but what is the matter with you? Why are you so pale and have tears in your eyes?"

"Ah! Good God!" cried Geoffrette, "how is it possible? It is not you who have drawn that face? You have looked at the portrait? You have copied it then, after all?"

"What portrait? I have copied nothing"

"Then—then—it is a vision, a miracle? Monsieur le Docteur, come and see, come and see! What do you say to that?"

"Well, what is the matter?" said the doctor, who had come to fetch Diane to luncheon "Why is Geoffrette crying out that there is a miracle?"

And looking at Diane's study he added "She has copied the miniature! But it is well done, my child, do you know that it is very well done? It is astonishing even, and the likeness is striking! Poor young woman, I think that I see her again. Come, my child, courage! You will make better portraits than your father, this one is not only beautiful, it is living"

Diane, confused, looked at her sketch, and saw in it a faithful resemblance to the cameo of her dreams, the type that she had always kept before her, but it was the work of her imagination, and no doubt the resemblance which Geoffrette and the doctor found in it was a

work of the imagination also. She would not tell them that she had not opened the locket, she was afraid that they would make her open it, and she did not believe herself worthy yet of this reward. During breakfast, however, she asked her good friend if he were quite sure that the portrait resembled her mother.

"How should I have known it at once if it were not like ?" said he "You know very well that I should not flatter you. Geoffrette," he added, "go and fetch me the drawing, I want to see it again."

Geoffrette obeyed, and the doctor looked at it again attentively and at different times, as he sipped his coffee. He said nothing, he seemed absorbed, and Diane asked herself with anguish if he were not retracting his first impression. At this moment Monsieur Flochardet was announced, for he came sometimes to take coffee with the doctor.

"What are you looking at there ?" he said to Monsieur Féron, when he had embraced his daughter.

"Look at it yourself," replied the doctor.

Monsieur Flochardet leaned over the drawing and turned pale.

"It is herself," he said, with emotion ; "yes, it is indeed that dear and noble being whom, without speaking of it to anyone, I think of without ceasing, and now more than ever ! But who drew this portrait, doctor ? It is a copy of the miniature that I gave you for Diane. Only it has infinitely more feeling, and is better rendered. The resemblance is more noble and more true ! It is very remarkable, and I have not a single pupil capable of doing as much. Say, say then, who did it ?"

"It is it is done," said the doctor with a malicious

## THE CASTLE OF PICTORDU

hesitation, "by a little pupil of—of mine, do not be displeased!"

Flochardet looked at his daughter, who had turned towards the window to hide her emotion, and looking also at the doctor in a questioning manner, he understood, and again turned his eyes on the drawing with an extreme surprise, seeking perhaps to criticise something in it, but finding nothing to take hold of, for he was in that state of mind when one is no longer so sure of oneself, and where one is forced to admit that in the most serious things it is possible to be mistaken.

Diane did not dare to turn round, she feared she was dreaming, she leaned on the window-sill to hide her trouble, without noticing the sun which struck keenly upon her head and which cast its ruby rays like red needles into her eyes. In this dazzling light she saw a tall white figure, marvellously beautiful, whose green robe shone like a spray of emeralds. It was the Muse of her dreams, it was her good Fairy, the Veiled Lady, but she had no longer the veil over her face, it floated round her like a golden glory, and her beautiful face, which was that of the cameo seen in her dreams, was exactly that which Diane had drawn, and which Flochardet now contemplated on the paper with an admiration mingled with a certain fear.

Diane stretched her arms towards this radiant figure who smiled upon her and said as she vanished, "You will see me again!"

Diane, oppressed and overjoyed, fell on a seat in the window with a stifled cry of joy. Flochardet and the doctor rushed towards her, thinking that she was ill, but she reassured them, and without telling

them of the vision she had seen, she asked her father if he were really a little pleased with her work

“ I am not only pleased,” he replied , “ I am overwhelmed and delighted. I have done you injustice, my child , you have the sacred fire, and in addition to this a knowledge of drawing beyond your age. Continue to work and hope , distrust yourself often, that is well ; but your father no longer distrusts your talent, and I am very happy ! ”

They embraced, weeping. Then Flochardet begged his daughter to leave him to talk business with the doctor, and she retired to her room, where she was alone, for Geoffrette was at dinner. Then Diane ran to her desk, and took from it the morocco case which she had fastened with a black satin ribbon in order to avoid the temptation of opening it too soon. At last she opened it, fell on her knees on a cushion, and kissed the miniature before looking at it ; then she closed her eyes to see again in her mind the ideal face which had promised to come back again. She saw it distinctly, and sure of her consent, she looked at length at the portrait. It was indeed the same face that she had drawn , it was the Muse, it was the cameo, it was the dream, and yet it was her mother , it was the reality found through poetry, feeling, and imagination.

Diane did not ask herself how this wonder had come about. She accepted the fact of what it had produced, and did not seek to find out how it could be explained. I think she did well. When one is still very young, it is better to believe in friendly divinities than to believe too much in oneself.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE DOWNFALL

**I** WILL not relate to you day by day the events of the two years which followed

Diane continued to work with courage and modesty, recalling often to her mind with a tender humility the counsel her father had given her

But her father was not always disposed to understand what he was himself incapable of doing. Without being aware of it, Diane was taking a road quite opposed to her father's. The part of the country in which she lived possessed many fine remains of antique statuary which people were now beginning to appreciate, for even French taste began also to seek a new outlet. Engraving spread, and made popular the precious discoveries at Herculaneum and Pompeii—paintings, vases, statues, furniture, objects of all sorts, and an "elegant simplicity," as they called it at that time, tended to replace the Chinese ornaments, distortion, and over-ornamentation.

Italy became better known, people travelled more, and if the fine colouring and pretty fancies of Watteau were still appreciated, Etruscan vases and Greek medals were no less admired. It was not precisely that the taste of the time of the "Valois" had returned, that epoch that we term to-day "the Renaissance", they were trying a new Renaissance, less original, but still charming. They made furniture that we call



now the style of Louis XVI and that was then called "antique furniture." They were very handsome without being very faithful, but they looked grand; and women themselves began to lower their high head-dresses and to let their hair be puffed negligently though still powdered round their foreheads.

The men curled their loose tresses and tied them behind with a simple ribbon, some even fastened them in a plait with a tortoise-shell comb. Flochardet, in his studio, was thus dressed, and painted portraits of which the arrangement was much less complicated than those which had brought him so much glory.

No one was therefore much astonished that his daughter, to whom some attention was now paid, should dress herself more simply than the fashion allowed, and he himself did not ask how this vision of the past, this taste for what was only just dawning, could have grown in her with so much precocity.

Only Flochardet grew sad and disgusted with his own skill. This awakening of form in art took him unawares, he who had always performed some conjuring trick to set off the dress of his portraits.

He found the reputation which he had enjoyed 'was' declining steadily. He had tried to increase his charges at the very moment when people were less inclined to pay him highly; and as it would have humiliated him to consent to a reduction, he saw his clients rapidly diminish.

The talent of his daughter was beginning to be known and valued, and people were not afraid to tell him that he ought to let her help him or even to let her supply his place. In truth, the poor man was not jealous of his dear Diane's talent, but, at any

price, he did not wish her to interrupt her useful studies, in order to apply herself to trade, for the sake of earning money and repairing the follies of Madame Laure

During those two years which I am summing up, the artist's position became very serious. He had wished to save everything by energetic work, he would willingly have killed himself with labour, but that which he had least expected had happened to him—work came to him less and less

Incapable of economising, Madame Laure had drawn out her little fortune from the common purse, and had retired to her own family at Nîmes, where she remained three parts of the year, only showing herself at short intervals with her husband, and the rest of the time spending in new dresses the little that she possessed, instead of helping to lighten the cares of the household

Diane, seeing her father forsaken, sad, and alone, had returned to his house to live with him, and divided her time between him and the doctor. Almost all the servants had been sent away. Geoffrette did the cooking, and Diane also helped so that her father, who was accustomed to good living, should not notice the downfall. She put order into the house and into his affairs, and served his interests so well that she deferred for a long while the disaster which threatened the house. But a day came when the creditors, tired of waiting, seized upon the house, the gardens, the little farm, the works of art, and the furniture

It was a very severe blow to Flochardet, who could no longer conceal it from his daughter and from his

friends. He determined to give up everything, and to find in another province, not a new set of clients it would take years to do that but work of some sort. He had already obtained work in the churches at Arles ; he painted virgins, saints, and angels, and at first he imagined he could be satisfied without making portraits. For an instant even, he had rejoiced, thinking he could pose as a great master in approaching what he called great painting. But the idea in people's minds for virgins and angels had also changed ; for a long time the plump smiling Madonnas of the time of Louis XV had been liked. People began now to wish them to be more serious, less like the pretty foster-mothers in the village, and many jests were cast at the nice little mammas that Flochardet in vain surrounded with a brilliant nimbus, strewn with marvellously painted roses. These raileries, which were kept from him by a sort of deference, reached Diane's ears notwithstanding. She understood that her father would not raise himself by this new attempt, and she entered the doctor's house one evening just as he was going to rest.

" My good friend," she said to him, " do you know that my father is lost ? "

" Yes, I know it," replied the doctor, " lost indeed ! He needs 200,000 francs, and no one will lend him that sum "

" But if anyone would be surety for him ? "

" Who would be such a fool ? It would be 200,000 francs thrown into the sea ; your father could never repay it."

" You doubt him ? "

" No, but as soon as he would have recovered

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apparently easy circumstances, his wife would come back and ruin him more than before ”

“ Will you not, dear friend, at least buy one of the houses, just to satisfy the creditors , you might allow me to live there with my father, and one day, when he is no longer here, you will take everything back. As for myself, I have enough talent to keep myself , I want so little, that a very little bit of talent will be enough for me ”

“ You forget, my dear child, that your father is not fifty years old, and I am seventy-five . If I buy his estates and leave him to enjoy them, I shall never get any interest for my money and I shall die in want. Is that what you want ? ”

“ No ! I will pay you the rent . I will work—my good Fairy will do miracles for me , I will earn money ! Try me, my kind friend ! Only keep back the sale of our possessions as surety for the payment, and you will see before two years ”

“ It is not so sure as that,” said the doctor . “ There is another solution, but it is a very grave one . I can buy your father’s town house, and all the works of art from his country house . I could thus put it into your power to preserve his home, his present way of living and his well-being, for you could let one part of the house, which is large, and receive a little rent to assist your wants . But see what would happen . Madame Laure would return to her husband, and would manage to drive you out of the house by her vexatious bickerings . You would not be able to bear this struggle which you never wished to engage in , you would come back to me, which would be very pleasant for me, but your father would fall again under the

yoke, his debts would begin again, for they could not live on the little rent which the tenants would pay. You would then abandon the property to save the honour of your name, your father would be ruined as completely then as now, and you would be ruined for ever, for the dowry which I wished to leave you would have been spent in frills and furbelows for your stepmother. You are aware that I wish to divide my fortune between yourself and my nephew. The sum which your father owes is about equivalent to the half of my property. Therefore, if I save your father I shall sacrifice your future, that is as sure as that two and two make four ! ”

“ Sacrifice it ! It must be sacrificed ! ” replied Diane with a tone of authority, as if she were one of those proud goddesses whose pure profile and beautiful figure she possessed. “ You never told me before what you intended to do for me , now that I know it, I am easy, my father is saved . You cannot advise me to abandon him to despair and misery, in order to provide for my future.”

“ This is all very well,” said the doctor, “ but what am I to do in the present time ? My income, that is to say my well-being ? I am then to have it diminished by half from to-morrow ? ”

“ If you had married me to anyone, would you not have done it ? ”

“ I counted on your remaining near me ; on our all living together , by this means the expense would not have been noticed. I should have had domestic happiness by way of compensation. But now instead of this you will deprive me in order to allow Madame Laure to live more extravagantly ”

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"No doubt," replied Diane, "this does not sound encouraging, but stop, I have thought it over. I am resolved to set up my authority in the place of hers, and I feel that I shall succeed. I will pay you interest on the capital that you trust me with. You may trust me indeed, for if I adore my father I adore you also, and I will not let you suffer, be it ever so little, for the benefits you are going to bestow on me."

"Come!" said the doctor, embracing her, "I will think it over. Go to bed, and sleep well, at all risks, and whatever happens, your father shall be saved until further orders, since you wish it."

In point of fact, the next day, the country and the town houses were put up to auction, and bought by Doctor Teron, but contrary to Diane's expectation, he kept them both for himself. He knew what he was about, and he did not wish to place her in such a position as to have the alternative of a struggle with her father or to be despoiled by him. He knew Flochardet's weakness where his wife was concerned, and he did not wish to bring about a fatal reconciliation. Nor did he by any means take Flochardet into his confidence.

"My friend," he said, "I much regret not having been able to save you this catastrophe, you are dispossessed of all your estates, but as I have become possessed of them, you will live quietly without debts henceforth. You will live with your daughter, to whom I shall let your house, now mine. She will turn to account the greater part of the estate which was only of use in giving balls and theatricals, and the clients you both get will suffice to pay your expenses, for Diane reckons on working by your side, and as

she makes progress, she will bring back the tide of fashion to your studio. She does not flatter herself without reason. I know that opinions worth having are in her favour, and if she had wished it, she might already have had orders for pictures and success."

Flochardet thanked the doctor, but objected that if his wife wished to return to him he should be forced to choose another abode.

"If that should happen," replied Monsieur Féron, "she will accept the home your daughter offers to you both, for your daughter is the principal tenant of my house."

"My wife will never consent to such an arrangement, she has too much pride! In order to live quite apart from me she will allege that I have no home to offer her, for she will never be indebted to my daughter."

"That will be a very bad pretext, for she has still her income, and nothing need prevent her paying board to her step-daughter. It would be one way of contributing to the common expenses, a duty which she is rather too apt to dispense with."

Flochardet felt that the doctor was right, and to tell the truth, his wife had made him so unhappy, that he could not regret her very much. His easy-going nature did not allow him to look upon the position that was offered to him as a humiliating one. Gentle and polite, and naturally trusting, he hoped to recover his clients and his independence as soon as it was known that his debts were paid.

## CHAPTER IX

### RETURN TO PICTORDU

**I**N point of fact, business did return to Flochardet. In the country people do not like a doubtful state of things, and besides, in the prospect of a possible bankruptcy everyone becomes alarmed, because everyone finds himself more or less compromised by the failure. When all was quickly paid up, and people saw the honest artist, penniless though he was, waiting gaily before his canvas for the benevolent faces of the ladies and gentlemen of the neighbourhood, these faces arrived smiling, and after a thousand marks of esteem and interest, more or less delicately expressed, they even asked him to set to work.

Diane at her easel, by his side, waited calmly and resolutely for the children of these ladies and gentlemen.

She had declared her choice of this speciality to avoid stepping into her father's shoes. They brought her all the rising generation of the town and neighbouring châteaux, the hope of families, the pride of mothers, a series of children almost all beautiful, for it must not be forgotten that Arles is the country of beauty. Diane showed a wonderful assurance, but it was a part that the poor child played from duty. She really felt too ignorant to do well, and grown-up young person as she was, she still invoked the miraculous assistance of her mother, the beautiful Muse, for



these two types were one and the same in her thoughts

The evening before she was to make her first trial, she sought in her desk an old relic that she had not looked at for a long time the little head of the infant Bacchus that she had found at Pictordu. She had learnt since that time to understand it, and she found it still more charming than she had before imagined.

“Dear little Bacchus,” she said to it, “you also have revealed to me the real life in Art. Inspire me now! Teach me the secret of truth, that a great unknown artist has put into you! I consent to be unknown as he is, if, like him, I can leave something beautiful as you are behind me.”

Diane did not allow herself to paint as yet. She began with pastel, which was much in vogue at that time, and with the first attempt she made such a charming and remarkable likeness that it was talked about for twenty miles round.

From that time clients came to her at the same time that they came to her father.

Families of nobles and bourgeois were glad to come to the studio where the father and daughter worked together, the one conversing gaily after years of melancholy or preoccupation which had driven all away from him, the other silent and modest, unconscious of her beauty, and conducting herself with quiet dignity. People remembered the giddy airs, the extravagant dresses, and the imperious manners of Madame Laure, and they did not regret being rid of her. They came formerly to gossip, because it was the fashion; now they came to converse, because it was the right thing to do.

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At the end of a year, Flochardet and his daughter, having lived very modestly but without any serious privation, found themselves able to pay rent to the doctor. He received the money and invested it in Diane's name. By his will he had made her sole heiress of all his fortune, but he refrained from saying so as much out of respect to Flochardet's dignity and to stimulate Diane's courage—as to keep Madame Laure at a safe distance.

Notwithstanding this prudent position, Madame Laure came back to the home as soon as she knew that the debts were paid and that things were going smoothly. She had but little enjoyment with her parents, who were economical people and had few resources, she hardly saw any society there, and her fine dresses were of but little use. She therefore came back, and Diane made it her duty to receive her well. At first Madame Flochardet seemed touched, but she soon wished to introduce herself into the good company which frequented her husband's studio. Her presence acted as a wet blanket, her prattle was no longer seasonable, they did not thank her for displaying her beautiful dresses and jewels which she ought to have sold to hasten the payment of the family debts. It was thought that she made herself too much at her ease, and that she used a tone of levity in speaking to Diane which was most unbecoming, in a word, she was made to feel that her presence was no longer agreeable to anyone. She took offence at this, exiled herself from the studio, and tried to renew her acquaintance outside the house. It was useless, her star was eclipsed, her beauty and her triumphs were alike gone. The tone of society was growing more severe, and she

was received coldly, and few of the visits which she paid were returned.

Then she had recourse to hypocrisy to reinstate herself ; and leaving off her pink dresses like the widow of Marlborough she took up the ways and deportment of a devout person. As she was not sincere she became worse in acting this part ; formerly she was only selfish and thoughtless, now she became envious and bad. She spoke evil of everyone, calumniated when necessary, disparaged everything, and disturbed the family harmony by her recriminations and complaints, her touchiness, and the sharpness of her character.

Diane bore with her with unalterable sweetness, and seeing that her father was still attached to this frivolous wife, did all that was possible and impossible to unite her again with their family life. There was only one thing which she resisted, and that was the unbridled desire of Madame Laure to put the house on its old footing. Calculating on the money which her husband was now earning, she wished to send away the lodgers and receive company as before. Diane held firm, and from that time she was treated as an enemy by her stepmother, called a tyrant, and denounced as a miser to whoever would listen to her.

Diane suffered much from this persecution, and many a time she was on the point of returning to the doctor's house in order to work in peace, but she forebore, knowing that her father would be unhappy without her. One day she received a visit from a young lady whom she did not hesitate for a moment to recognise, so keenly was her memory developed where faces were concerned. It was Madame la Vicomtesse Blanche

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de Pictordu, married a short time back to one of her cousins, still pretty, still poor and discontented with her fate, but still proud of her name which she had the consolation of not having changed. She presented her young husband to Diane, silly youth with a common foolish-looking face. But he was a Pictordu, a true Pictordu, of the elder branch, and Blanche would not have comprehended that any other could be more worthy of her.

Notwithstanding this obstinacy in her ideas, Blanche had become more sociable, and as in all other respects she was intelligent enough, she behaved very graciously to Diane, complimented her on her talent, and did not affect as before to run down her profession. Diane felt much pleasure in seeing her again, her name and her presence brought back her sweetest recollections of childhood. In order to get her to come again, she asked her to let her paint her portrait. Blanche turned red with pleasure as at the time when she received the turquoise clasp. She knew she was pretty, and to see her face reproduced by a clever hand was an intoxication for her, but she was poor, and Diane understood her hesitation.

"I ask this favour of you," she said, "to reproduce a perfect face is a satisfaction which I do not meet with every day, and the difficulty of it incites me to improve."

In the depths of her heart Diane only felt she was paying an old debt to the remembrance of Pictordu. Blanche could not understand this mysterious delicacy, she thought the humour was all due to her charms. She let herself be pressed a little and urged several obstacles, but at the same time she was afraid of being

taken at her word. She had only a few days to spend at Arles, her position did not allow her to stay in a luxurious town ; her husband, occupied with farming and hunting, pressed her to return to the country house where they were settled.

“ I will only make a slight sketch of you in three colours,” replied Diane, “ black, white, and red. If I succeed, it may be very pretty, and I will only ask one morning of you.”

Blanche accepted for the next day ; and on that day she appeared in a pretty sky-blue robe with the turquoise locket passed through a ribbon round her neck.

Diane was inspired , she made one of her best portraits, and the Vicomtesse was so enraptured with her own beauty that she had tears of gratitude at the ends of her long black eyelashes which shaded her blue eyes. She embraced Diane and begged her to come and see her in her château.

“ At the Castle of Pictordu ? ” asked Diane with surprise ; “ you told me you were still living with your father ; have you rebuilt the old Manor ? ”

“ Not entirely,” replied the Vicomtesse ; “ we found that impossible, but we have restored a little pavilion, and we shall be installed there next month. There is a spare room for a friend, and if you will come and occupy it you will be the most amiable person in the world.”

The offer was sincere : Blanche added that her father would be happy to see her again, as well as Monsieur Flochardet, whom he had always remembered with kindness, and whom he called “ his friend Flochardet ” when he heard his fine paintings talked

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about Diane had a great wish to revisit Pictordu, and she promised if possible to go there the following month, with or without her father, for he had promised her for a long time to make a little journey if it were only to go and see his old aunt the nun at Mende. Pictordu was almost on the road, and certainly she would make a detour in order to go there.

When Madame Laure found that Diane was thinking of taking a little rest which was necessary for her health, she lost her temper. She had been obliged to admit that Diane was gaining more money than her father, that she was more esteemed as a painter and more liked. Her absence might injure the interests of the house, and Madame Laure made this felt so bitterly that Diane was excessively provoked and hurt. She bargained over one or two weeks of liberty for her who for two years had denied herself everything and worked without relaxation to repair the disaster caused by this useless and idle person.

It must be confessed that the situation was a painful one and that Diane had been very courageous in refusing the doctor's offer, who had invited her to see Italy or Paris, and who was desirous of taking her if she showed the slightest wish to go. Diane did desire it passionately, but she would not confess it because she did not wish to give in to the temptation. She believed it too soon, and that her father was not sufficiently reinstated to do without her during several months.

When she saw that by way of thanks for her sacrifice the right of absenting herself for a few days was disputed, she was on the point of being discouraged with her task and determined to break through the

obstacles. She resisted, however, replied gently that she would soon be back, and packed her things, interrupted twenty times by her stepmother's importunate objections. The doctor was obliged to interfere, and he decided that Diane should start the following day with her old nurse Geoffrette. He advised the dear child to make a note of her apparitions if she had the good fortune to have any again, in order to relate them to him as agreeably as before.

It was a two days' journey to Saint-Jean-Garçon. Monsieur Marcelin Féron, the doctor's nephew, who had become a renowned doctor himself, would accompany the travellers to the town where they must stop the night. From there he went to a friend who lived in the neighbourhood, while Diane, who was delighted at having discovered the honest postilion Romanèche, took the road for Pictordu with her nurse in a post-chaise. Some necessary repairs had been made to this terrible road, and in the afternoon our travellers arrived without accident at the foot of the Castle terrace.

The entrance was no longer there. The restored pavilion, which was no other than the ancient "Bath of Diana," had its entrance lower down. But Diane wanted to be alone to see the statue which had spoken to her—she trembled lest she should not find it—she therefore sent Geoffrette and Romanèche on in front, and scaling a little barrier lately put up, she climbed lightly the irregular and broken steps of the grand staircase.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, the sun shed its slanting rays on the objects around her. Before she could discover her beloved statue, which

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was screened from her view by shrubs, Diane saw its shadow cast on the sand of the terrace, and her heart beat with joy. She ran forward and gazed at it with surprise, in her remembrance the figure was gigantic, in reality it was barely life-size. Was she grand and beautiful and monumental as Diane had kept her in her thoughts? No, she was a little stiff, and the folds of her dress were too marked and too much broken, but she was elegant and graceful all the same, and Diane, who would have been broken-hearted if she had had to despise her, breathed a kiss in the air, which came indeed from her heart, but the statue did not return it.

The terrace was in the same deserted state as before. The long grass was untrodden, and Diane saw that no one ever walked there. She knew later that Blanche, who was afraid of snakes and looked on the most innocent snakes as deadly vipers, never went herself into the ruins or allowed anyone else to go there. However, she lived in the middle of these ruins, and Diane was astonished at the same time that she rejoiced to see that this solitude and disorder which had formerly charmed her had in no way suffered any so-called "improvement," that is to say, alteration.

She admired this pell-mell of thick bushes and dead trees, magnificent wild plants and plants formerly cultivated, as free, as wild one as the other, this chaos of stones, where the moss invaded the natural rock as well as the sculptured stone.

She saw again the little stream which had formerly supplied the basins and cascades, and which murmured its way between the grass and the pebbles. She



contemplated the façade of the elegant renaissance style, where the living ivy enlaced itself with the garlands of ivy carved out of stone. Some finely worked windows, some bell-turrets had perhaps disappeared. Diane did not remember clearly these details; the whole had still that smiling and noble aspect which the edifices of that brilliant epoch keep even in their decay.

## CHAPTER X

### THE STATUE'S SPEECH

**D**IANE wished to find the way to the pavilion across the chaos of the ruined interior, and she was pleased at being able to find it without hesitation. Blanche, who had heard the carriage arrive, ran to meet her, and received her with many caresses, then made her enter the pavilion of the hot baths, where she had passed a memorable night of her existence.

Alas ! Here all was changed. Of the great round hall a kind of drawing-room had been made, and the central fountain had disappeared. The marbles which formed the fountain had been cut and made into chimney-pieces. The decorated and vaulted roof was transformed into a ceiling of crude blue, the nymphs, alas ! alas ! no longer threaded their light and airy dance on the circular wall. The drawing-room, clothed with hangings of orange coloured cloth with large bouquets, was henceforth square, the parts cut off served for small chambers.

The arcaded cloister had been cleared of its ruins, and of its wild plants, the interior had become a kitchen-garden, and the spring of water, cleared of its weeds, and centipedes, disappeared captive, under a prison of drainage-pipes.

A party of hens were scratching a dung-heap in a little court close by, the hall formerly of the stoves, and which was still flagged with porphyry. An

avenue of mulberry-trees freshly planted, which did not seem very decided to accommodate themselves to the soil and the climate, led down to the new road, without passing by either the old park or the ruins. The owners of the Castle of Pictordu, while sliding into a corner of the nest of their ancestors, had done all in their power to turn their back upon it and never to cross its ancient paths. While doing her best out of kindness to admire the part that Blanche had rescued from ruin, Diane sighed, thinking what a different part she herself would have taken.

But Blanche appeared so proud and so well-satisfied with her arrangements that she took good care not to criticise them. The Marquis and his son-in-law soon arrived for supper ; the son-in-law red and sunburnt, calling his dogs, speaking with a loud vibrating voice, and shouting with laughter after each sentence, though no one could guess what he had found to be so amusing ; the Marquis, invariably polite, affectionate, keeping in the background, quiet and melancholy. He received Diane most kindly, and had forgotten nothing of her former visit. And then he overwhelmed her with a number of strange questions which it was impossible for her to reply to without entering into explanations which one would give to a child. The good man lived a life so retired from the world, his horizon was so narrow, that while wishing to talk on all subjects to show he was not behind the times, he showed that he understood nothing of any subject whatever.

Blanche, more shrewd and with a slight sprinkling of the knowledge of the world, suffered much from her father's simplicity, and still more from the assurance

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with which her husband set him to rights with notions still more false. She contradicted them both with visible disdain. Diane regretted the former solitude of Pictordu, and asked herself why she had left her father's pleasant talk and the doctor's interesting conversation to listen to these three insipid persons who had not even the merit of agreeing with each other.

She excused herself on the plea of fatigue, and retired early to the narrow little room, which her host dignified by the title of chamber of honour. She could not sleep. An odour of fresh paint obliged her to open the window to escape headache.

Then she saw that this window opened on to a little outside staircase joining to the wall. It was a remains of the ancient edifice, the hand-rail was not restored, but the night was clear and beautiful. Diane wrapped herself in her mantle and descended, happy to find herself alone, and to be able to go as before in search of the marvellous castle of her dream. The beautiful Muse, whom she looked upon as her good Fairy, did not come and take her by the hand, as before, to help her scale the spiral staircases which rose in space over the crumbling roofs. But she reconstructed in her thought this fairy-like villa, created in the depths of a desert, in the Italian style when Italy was far before us in taste in art.

She saw again in spirit the festivities of this vanished splendour which could not be revived in their ancient form, and which industry was already banishing from the future.

She did not meet any phantom in her walk, but she felt a lively joy in contemplating the fine effects of the

moonlight among the ruins. She could mount pretty high upon the layers of rocks which overlooked the Castle, to see the vista of light reflected by the little river in the depth of the ravine. Here and there a block of rock which obstructed its bed stood out, a black mass in the middle of a shimmer of diamonds. The owls hooted to each other, the broom and bracken gave out their wild perfumes ; a profound calm reigned in the air, the branches of the old trees were as immovable and looked as much sculptured as the stone ornaments of the terrace

Diane felt a strange desire to sum up her short life in the midst of this nature which seemed absorbed in its contemplation of Eternity. She looked back on her childhood, on her moments of serious curiosity, her days of drooping sickness, her aspirations towards a mysterious ideal, her discouragements, her enthusiasms, and her hopes. But there she stopped. her future was vague and mysterious, like certain phases of the past. She felt all that was still lacking to her to overcome the humble boundary which she had accepted in coming to her father's aid.

She well knew that beyond the mere handicraft which would ensure her independence and dignity she must soar much higher, but could she ever fulfil the conditions required for this development ? Could she travel ? Know and feel ? Could she shake off the surroundings, the habits, the duty of each day, this limit that her father could have crossed, but where he stopped to obey the exigencies of a woman who only looked at Art as a means of gain ?

Diane felt herself bound as if with chains, stopped, broken by this same woman with whom her father's

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lazy vacillating spirit must daily contend She had been on the point but now of crushing it with her scorn, but she restrained herself, for she had a self-control which was wanting in her father, and when she felt herself ready to burst out she felt also a secret strength which said "You know that you must conquer yourself"

She recalled these moments of inward struggle, and thought of her mother, who had no doubt bequeathed her this secret and precious strength of patience Then she ardently begged this protecting soul to enter into her own to teach her her duty, as her face had entered into her vision to reveal her beauty Ought she resolutely to renounce the knowledge of the high enjoyments of the mind in order to remain with her father? Ought she to resist the voice of this maternal Muse who had raised and transported her into the region of the beautiful and the true, to show her this endless path where the artist ought not to stop?

She reflected thus as she walked, until she found herself near the faceless statue which had first inspired her She leant against the pedestal, her head resting on the cold feet She seemed then to hear a voice, which if it came from the statue resounded with strong vibrations through her own being, the voice said "Leave the care of thy future to the soul of thy mother, who watches over and around thee Together we will surely find the road to the ideal, only accept the present as a halting-place where, whilst resting, thou wilt still work Think not there can be a choice between duty and a noble ambition! The two are made to walk hand in hand helping one another Think not that passion conquered, and

pain endured, are the enemies of talent ; far from exhausting they stimulate it ! Remember that with tears thou didst find the type thou hast so long sought ; and be sure that when thou dost suffer bravely, thy talent grows with thy growth, though unknown to thee, and strengthens with thy strength. The health of the intellect does not lie in repose, it is only in victory."

Diane returned to the house deeply impressed by this inward revelation, and leaving her window open she slept soundly.

The following day she felt a delicious calm pervade her whole being. She listened without impatience to the artlessness of the good Marquis and the gross platitudes of his son-in-law. She even communicated her good humour to Blanche, and led her, a little against her inclination, to explore the ruins by daylight.

The good doctor had not been satisfied with only teaching his dear Diane to know beauty in Art, he had also taught her to seek in Nature, and the knowledge he had imparted to her made her walks very interesting. He had begged her to bring him back from her journey some rare plants which are peculiar to the Cevennes: *Reseda jaquini*, *Saxifraga clusii*, *Senecio lanatus*, etc.

Diane searched for them and found them ; she gathered them carefully for her old friend, and collected on her own account some less rare but charming flowers : the rock potentilla , the fine blue geranium of the meadows, and the graceful knotted geranium ; the soap-wort, which carpets the rocky sides of the river with its innumerable pink blossoms ; the Alpine plant, which expands in the damp places over ruins ;

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and the Montpellier ranunculus, which covers the turf of the terrace with its stars of gold

Whilst searching for these flowers, Diane picked up a piece of money almost shapeless, covered with a thick layer of oxide, and gave it to Blanche, telling her to clean it with great care, avoiding scratching it

“Keep it,” replied the Vicomtesse, “if you attach any value to these old farthings, as far as I am concerned, I know nothing about them, and I have plenty of others which I do not value the least in the world”

“You must show them to me,” replied Diane, “I don’t know much about them, still, I might be able to distinguish those that are interesting, with the help of Dr Feron, who is very learned—who knows? My touch turns everything into gold, perhaps unknown to yourself you possess a little treasure!”

“Which I will give you for nothing with all my heart, dear Diane. They are all of copper, or very thin gold, or else of blackened silver”

“That is no reason! If they are, any of them, precious, I will tell you later on, and repay you their value”

She was then shown the medals collected formerly by the Marquis and thrown on one side in a corner of his house, where they had some difficulty in finding them. Diane judged that they were not all without value, and charged herself with having them examined by a competent person. She would not clean the one she had picked up, fearing to spoil it, and attaching I do not know what superstitious idea to this personal finding. She wrapped it in some paper, and put it in her trunk with the others

The next day she went to see the sun rise from the



top of the mountain ; she was alone and walked at random. She found herself in a rocky chasm, in front of a beautiful little waterfall, which dashed bright and joyous in the midst of wild roses and silky-tufted clematis. The slanting sun cast a red ray on this exquisite little picture, and for the first time Diane felt the intoxication of colour. As the mountain was only lighted in outline, she thought over this magical life of Light, more or less diffused, and more or less reflected, passing from brilliancy to softness, and from glowing tones to cold ones, through indescribable harmonies. Her father had often talked of neutral tints. "My father," she cried, involuntarily, as if he had been there, "there are no neutral tints, I vow there are none !"

Then she smiled at her own transport, and drank anew this revelation which came to her from heaven and earth, from foliage and waters, from herbs and rocks, from Dawn chasing away the night, from Night retiring gracious and docile under its transparent veil that the sun sought to pierce. Diane felt that she could paint, without ceasing to draw, and her heart trembled with hope and joy.

On her return, she stopped again near the statue, and recalled what she had felt the previous day formulate in her soul

"If it is thou who speakest to me," she thought, "thou hast taught me well yesterday. Thou hast made me understand that a good resolution is worth more than travelling. Thou hast told me to enter smiling into the prisons of duty ; I promised to do so, and behold ! To-day I have made in Art an intoxicating conquest. I have done better than under-

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stand, I have felt, I have seen<sup>1</sup> I have acquired a new faculty, the light came into my eyes as soon as the will entered into my mind Thanks, oh my mother, oh my Fairy, thanks to thee I hold the true secret of life ”

Diane quitted Pictordu and staid two days at Mende On her return home she set to work at her profession, and at the same time tried painting without saying anything to anybody She had some good paintings lent her, and every morning she copied for two hours She followed attentively her father's work, who still painted virgins for the churches, and who by force of handling the brush had acquired much cleverness She saw what he did and what he did not do, she profited by the good quality of his work and not by his faults And one fine day she tried to paint a portrait, she copied some children and made angels of them Another fine day, later on, people began to perceive that she painted very beautifully and very nicely, and her reputation spread afar

Madame Laure felt that her detested but patient stepdaughter was really a hen who laid golden eggs, and who must not be killed She grew calm, was submissive, made believe to cherish her, and for want of real tenderness, of which her heart was not capable, she showed her respect and consideration She resigned herself to worry her no longer, discovered that she was very happy, and wanted nothing, not even a certain luxury, for Diane deprived herself very willingly of a dress to give her a handsomer one, in fact, no longer to torment the good Flochardet who, thanks to his daughter, was becoming as wise and happy as in his first wife's time

One day the Vicomtesse de Pictordu arrived, and after bestowing a thousand caresses on Diane and beating about the bush a long time, she proceeded to ask her if she had been able to extract anything out of her coins. She confessed that the Pavilion of Baths had cost her more to restore than she had expected, and that her husband was much embarrassed by having to pay a sum of money, small in reality, but considerable for him, which he had been obliged to borrow.

She added that if Diane had still her artistic passion for the ruins of Pictordu, she would resign herself to part with them, and that she would give them up to her with all the rocky part of the old park for a very moderate price.

“My dear Vicomtesse,” replied Diane, “if some day I should be in a position to gratify such a fancy I will wait till you are seriously tired of your ancestral castle, but let me assure you such a sacrifice is in no way necessary! I have by no means forgotten your ancient coins; it required time to have them valued and made known. I have just completed these inquiries, and I have the pleasure of telling you that there are three or four of very great value, most especially the one which I found myself. I was going to write and communicate to you the various propositions that the doctor has received from museums and from amateur collectors. Since you are here, I should like you to consult Dr. Féron yourself, but understand that, if you choose to accept to-day the offers made, you can realise a sum of money double to that which you have named as necessary.”

Blanche, overcome with amazement, threw herself

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on Diane's neck, and called her her Guardian Angel ! She had an interview with the good doctor, who arranged matters for the best possible price, and who promptly paid in the sum total of this little fortune Blanche returned home joyful, after having entreated Diane to come and see her

But Diane had no further call to the Castle of Pictordu She did not wish to possess it materially, she possessed it in her memory as a dear and sacred vision which appeared to her when she wished The Fairy who had first greeted her at Pictordu had quitted the Castle to follow her, and the inspiring Spirit was now living with her for ever, and to whatever place she transported herself She built for Diane castles innumerable, palaces filled with marvellous treasures, she gave her all she could wish for, mountains, forests, and rivers, the stars of heaven, as well as flowers and birds Everything laughed and danced in her soul, everything sparkled before her eyes when, after hard work, she felt she had made progress and realised a step farther in her beloved Art

Need I tell you any more of her life ? You can guess it, my children it was a noble life, very happy and fruitful in exquisite work Diane, at twenty-five, married the nephew of the doctor, her adopted brother, an excellent man of considerable merit, and who had thought only of her

She thus became rich, and was able to do a great deal of good, amongst other things, entirely at her own expense she founded a studio for young girls who were poor She travelled with her husband to those beautiful countries of which she had dreamed, and she always returned with fresh zest and happiness

to her own country, her old friend, to her father, and even to her stepmother, whom she had come to love from having pardoned her so much, for it is the law of fine natures · they become attached to those they have had to bear with ; they cling to those who have made them suffer. Large-hearted persons love to sacrifice themselves, a lucky thing for the narrow-hearted ones. There are many of both kinds in the world, and in appearance the latter live and flourish at the expense of the former ; but in reality those who give and forgive know the highest pleasures, for it is with them that Spirits and Fairies delight to disport themselves ; these Spirits are absolutely free and clear in vision ; they fly from persons who are wrapped up in and satisfied with themselves , and only show themselves to those eyes that are enlarged by enthusiasm and devotion.

THE END

*Of this book there are 1,300 copies  
of which 1,260 are for sale*

*Printed by Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ltd ,  
London and Aylesbury*

*The first ten copies are signed by  
Hamish Miles*